OLIVER BURTON.

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THE MANCHESTER MAN.

VOL. III.

THE MANCHESTER MAN.

BY

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"GOD'S PROVIDENCE HOUSE,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE MANCHESTER MAN.

CHAPTER I.

CLOGS.

LEAVING the Chadwicks at their own door, where Captain Travis would fain have lingered had he been encouraged, Jabez and he fell back as guards to their reverend friend, whose excitability might otherwise have involved him in some unpleasantness, so disorderly a riff-raff occupied the streets.

Turning down Church Street, they pursued their dimly-lighted way along Cannon Street, (so named from dismounted cannon captured from "rebels" which served as cor-

ner posts), through Hanging Ditch to Hyde's Cross; thence past the deserted Apple Market, and Dr. Smith's ancient labyrinth of a house, to the Parson's less antiquated domicile in the corner by the Grammar School and those College-gates which had been the portals of peace and promise to Jabez, and not only to him, but to hundreds besides.

The excitement of old Joshua had been toned down amongst the wax-lights and pleasant faces around the Ashtons' well-spread supper-table, and at first he was disposed to be conversable after his own peculiar manner. They had purposely avoided Shude-Hill Market by an ample circuit; but stragglers of both sexes from the scene of riot lay maundering or asleep in their path, or crossed it at every turn, in all stages of inebriation and disorder; until the natural irritability of the chaplain (increased by failing health) broke forth in loud-voiced indignation, ending in a wail

that he was "getting old and powerless," or he would "rise like another John Knox, and denounce the wickedness rampant in the land."

"A good man lives there, Jabez," said he, pointing to the black and white home of the head master, where lighted windows told of hospitality awake, "a good man, but for whom I should not be alive to tell you; but there are those in the pulpit, my lads, whom the Church ought to spew out, lest they poison the flocks it is their duty to feed. Can the stream be pure if the fountain be polluted? And how shall we rebuke the gross excesses of the untaught rabble, whilst chambering, gluttony, and drunkenness defile the high places of the land? Ugh! There wants another flood to wash Europe sweet and clean! The sin on the earth was not greater in the days of Noah!"

They were crossing the space before the two closed gates when he paused for

lack of breath; and Travis, with no thought but to change the subject, observed to Jabez, over the head of the panting pastor—

"How quiet this little nook of ground is now! Yet to me, and no doubt to you, Mr. Clegg, it is haunted by ghosts of old times!"

That set Joshua off again.

"Ugh! to hear a lad of five and twenty talk of old times! What's the world coming to? Ghosts indeed! It had like to have been haunted by ghosts of something more than old times, as Jabez and I know to our cost. I've never been right since the young ruffians had me in their clutches! And mark you, my lads, and think of it when you have young ones of your own to rear: there's no worse sign for a country or a family than when the young jibe and jeer, mock and scorn their elders. When grey hairs fail to command respect, virtue, principle, and religion are at their lowest ebb."

He stood within his own gate as he said this, and as Tabitha opened the door for her master, he checked all reply with—

"There! you've had a sermon for nothing. Ugh! you'll forget it when the old man's back turns. Good night, lads! See you steer clear of brawls, and give drunken fools a wide berth."

Leaving the young men so abruptly dismissed to retrace their steps towards Hyde's Cross, it may be as well if we throw a light on some of Parson Brookes's dark allusions. Time had not smoothed the old man's eccentricities, nor modified the antagonism between the Grammar School boys and the ex-master. They were always at war, and there never was wanting a *casus belli*. The previous September he had been more than usually irritated by a lampoon which began—

"O Jotty, you dog,
Your house we well know
Is headquarters of prog——"

the purport of which was to fix on him the

stigma of inviting a friend to dine, and regaling him with a black-pudding only.

Lashed to fury, he burst into the Grammar School when the first and second-form boys were assembled in the afternoon to rehearse the speeches which, according to custom, they were to deliver in public at the annual commemoration in October. He braved them in his hottest style, winding up with, "You are a set of blockheads! I would not come to hear your speeches if you would pay me for it!"

There was a general cry, "Turn him out! Turn him out!" But Jotty would not be turned out. He stuck himself in the doorway with his legs against the doorpost, and his back against the door itself, to the extreme risk of broken limbs, whilst his young and vigorous opponents brought their strength to bear upon the door to force him out.

With such odds he was sure to be overcome; but, driven into the yard, he

fought with his antagonists like a mastiff at bay, and they, like the cowards they must have been, to have assailed in a body an old man (under any provocation), by sheer force of numbers, bore him backwards to the wall, and, but for the opportune arrival of Dr. Smith, would have repeated the outrage perpetrated on Jabez Clegg eight years before.

He might well say Dr. Smith had saved his life. Such a fall, whether in high or low water, to so old a man, would have been certain destruction. They broke his heart, I think, if they did not break his limbs, for he never was the same man afterwards. Even old Mrs. Clowes used to rally him on his frequent "fits of the dumps."

Whether Jabez and Ben Travis had, or had not, lost sight of the Parson's homily, they were linked arm in arm, the rich yeomanry officer and the unpretending smallware-salesman, just as, nearly nine

years previously, the big, raw-boned youth, with a heart large enough to match his frame, had linked his arm in that of the poor Blue-coat boy, as a friend and protector, when as yet his admittance into society was undreamed of.

Where the four roads met at Hyde's Cross, a staggering Charlie (as the watchmen were called, much as, at this day, they are Bobbies) passed them, with his horn lantern and staff, and his rattle in his belt, proclaiming—

"Past ten o'clock! (hiccup). "And a foine moonleet neet!"

The two stood for a moment; then, animated by a desire to ascertain if Joshua Brookes had spoken sooth, or, in his spleen exaggerated, they turned up Shudehill, all alive with people who were ordinarily at that hour in bed, and made their way to the market.

Exaggerate! Joshua Brookes had seen but in part, and painted but in part.

Every avenue to the market was a scene of debauchery. Hogarth's print of "Gin Lane" was feeble beside it. The distribution of food was over, but that of drink continued. The oil-lamps of the street, the dying illumination lamps, and the misty moonlight showed a picture of unimaginable grossness: whilst their ears were assailed with foulness which would have shocked a hardened man of the world —how much more these inexperienced young friends!

Children, men, and women, their clothes torn or disarrayed, lay singly, or in groups, on the paths, or in the gutters, asleep or awake, drunk, sick, helpless, exposed; there was fighting and cursing over the ale yet procurable; there were loaves in the gutters, and meat trampled in the mire; food which, properly distributed, would have gladdened many a poor, hard-working family, too self-respecting to join that clamorous mob.

The two young men turned away sick and disgusted.

"Henry Hunt, in advocating the disuse of excisable liquors," said Jabez, thoughtfully, "may only have designed to cripple the Government; but surely no one could witness scenes like these, whether Whig or Tory, without feeling that some restriction on drink is absolutely necessary for the safety of the State and the comfort of the people."

"You are right, Mr. Clegg," responded Travis, heartily. "Men of all politics ought to meet on this ground. I shall see how far my little influence goes to check intemperance henceforth. Something must be done, and that promptly."

"Whatever I can do to second you, you may depend on, though beyond our own warehouse my opportunities are small," said Jabez; "still, if I can influence one within our walls, that one may act on two outside, and so we may prevail in the end."

"Yes," added Travis, "and if this night be not eloquent in its protest against drink, all humanity must be equally debased and brutalised."

Some caution had been necessary to cross the Market, so as to avoid insult, the captain's bulk and uniform rendering him conspicuous, and his corps being in anything but good odour. They had kept well within the shade of the pillared piazza which extended along the side to their right, and, stunned by the uproar of brawling and fighting crowds, picked their way between degraded humanity in heaps on the pavement, crushed hats and bonnets, torn caps and shawls, boots and shoes which had done duty as drinking vessels, sodden meat and bread, and had much ado to avoid splashing through puddles of ale and other abominations. They had emerged into Oak Street, glad to have got tolerably clear of the clamour and brutality, when a cry from the direction of Tib Street,

"Watch! help! watch!" fell on their ears in tones which had a strangely familiar ring to Jabez.

Hastening on at a run, they came upon a decently dressed man struggling against three or four drunken ruffians with heavy clogs on their feet. They had got the man down, and were vociferating with oaths not to be repeated here.

"Gi'e him a lick wi' thi clog!" "Punce him well!" "Shut up his tater-trap fur him!" "Purr him i' th' bread-basket!" "Fettle his mug wi' thi clog!"

Before Jabez and his companion could prevent it, a heavy thud, followed by a groan, told of a brutal kick; the two only dashed among them in time to arrest the other clogs, already on the backward swing for force; and saved the prostrate man by turning the fury of the savages on themselves. The cowardly brutes, however, stood little chance against sobriety and skill, backed by the muscular frame of

Jabez and the herculean one of Travis, even though they carried weapons of offence on their feet, and plied them vigorously; and before a droning watchman hove in sight to spring his rattle for assistance, they were overmastered or put to the rout.

Most thankful was Jabez for the impulse which had directed their steps that way when, on raising the fallen man, the light of an adjacent oil-lamp projecting from the wall fell on his blood-stained face, and revealed Tom Hulme, who had been drawn into that unusually disorderly neighbourhood by like curiosity with their own, and been set upon without provocation. He walked with pain, and they supported his steps to the Infirmary, not finding Mr. Huertley, on whom they called, at home. But so fertile had that evening been of serious injuries, he was some time before he could obtain attention. Thirteen far more urgent cases had preceded his. At length

his head and cut lip were plaistered up, a reviving draught administered, and after some examination of bruises and poking and pressing of his body, three of his ribs were pronounced "broken." His defenders were disposed to smile at the surgeon when, besides an embrocation for bruises, he prescribed "a succession of oatmeal poultices applied internally"—in other words, a cushion of as much oatmeal porridge as the patient could consume, to press the crushed ribs gently into position.

It was, however, not much of a laughing matter to Tom Hulme, or to loving Bess, who looked aghast at this deplorable termination of a day's jollity. Nor was there a trace of mirth on the face of Jabez when at parting with Ben Travis on the Mosley Street door-step, he gripped, more in pain than pleasure, the big hand extended so cordially.

It was after midnight, but from the open windows of the still lighted drawing-

room the thin quick ears of Jabez had caught the sound of Augusta's melodious voice blending with that of Laurence Aspinall in a popular duet, although the notes of the latter were neither so clear nor so steady as they might have been. The pallor on her foster-son's face Bess attributed to tender-hearted sympathy for her injured husband; but Jabez hurried away from her oppressive thanks to the solitude of his own chamber, where he could bury his face in his quivering hands, and unseen wrestle with emotions of which she had no conception.

Never had he known a day so chequered. The same sun which had looked down at noontide on the triumph of his amateur brush, had beamed on Augusta Ashton's conscious cheeks, as she accepted his rival's familiar act of gallantry without so much as a frown. The evening had made a man of him—lifted him into a new sphere—brought him, so to speak, nearer to

his divinity, within the radius of her smiles, the music of her voice. She had put her small white hand within his, and blessed him with a word or two of shy recognition; but Laurence Aspinall had again come like a cloud between him and his sunbeam; her sweetest smiles, her softest tones, were for the intruder; her arm had rested willingly on his, her voice had blent with his in sentimental song, and darkness once more shut out hope from Jabez.

"Common sense might have taught me that my love was folly, presumption, madness!" he argued with himself; "that the heiress of a wealthy man would not stoop to her father's Blue-coat apprentice. But oh!" he groaned, "I had hoped to raise myself step by step nearer to her level—to make myself worthy of her as a man, if I had not riches to lay at her feet. She is young, and what might I not accomplish with industry ere she came of age? but now——"

He tore his neckcloth off, and cast it from him, stripped off coat and vest, and flung them aside, as though they held his passionate folly, and he had done with it, then sank into a chair, the very impersonation of listless hopelessness. He had gone through all this struggle once before, and thought he had overcome his weakness; but at the touch of the enchanter's wand love had blazed up afresh, and was not to be smothered.

His reverie was broken into by the tread of many feet on the staircase below, and the murmur of voices calling one to another; the hall-door shut with a clang, and then a light foot came tripping up the stair alone, and from heart and lips dropped unconsciously the soft refrain of that too well-known duet. She, too, was carrying to her chamber memories of the night, and bearing the burden blithely.

He listened until a door closed upon step and song. Then, as if its echoes

pierced his soul, he set his teeth and clenched his outstretched hands in mute agony. There was more than hopeless love in this—there was jealousy also. Then he murmured half audibly, "If he were only worthy of her I could bear it better; but to see her cast her heart at the feet of one who will trample on it, is beyond mortal endurance."

He started to his feet. A bright thought irradiated his face.

"Coward that I am! I am quitting the battle without striking a blow. I am myself unworthy of Augusta if I surrender her to a heartless profligate without an effort to save her. 'Faint heart never won fair lady.' Women have stooped lower, and lowly men have looked higher ere now. I am making way, but I must make money too, if I would look above me. Father and mother look on me with favour, and why not the daughter? She may learn the worthlessness of the fine gentleman in time.

Courage, Jabez! Work with a will: do your duty. Miss no opportunity, and the gold and the goddess may both be yours in the end, and honestly won."

He sprang into bed fresher and lighter than he had been all day, the prayer of that other Jabez rising from his heart with the fervour of old times.

CHAPTER II.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

THE Palace Inn on the north side of Market Street Lane was the last relic of that cramped thoroughfare to disappear at the bidding of Improvement. Possibly because its many eyes and bald dark-red-brick face looked out on a space so much beyond the twenty-one yards assigned by Act of Parliament to the regenerated street that the improvement committee had no powers to meddle with it, for surely its historic associations were not sufficient to protect it. Prince Charles Edward had been hospitably lodged and entertained beneath its roof by its owner, Mr. Dickenson, long ere it became an inn; he had harangued

his devoted follower from the stone plateau of its double flight of steps, with his hand perchance on its smooth rail of unornamented iron; but in isolated dignity rather than palatial pretensions lay its chief safeguard. Be that as it may, fourteen or fifteen years elapsed between the first act of demolition for widening (at the shop of a Mr. Maund), and that last feat of narrowing, which blocked up and darkened history (as represented by the Palace) with common stone warehouses for every-day merchandise. Alas! Clio and all her sister Muses *must* succumb when Mammon is on the march!

But Mammon had only got his first foot in the street on that Thursday morning in July, which blushed at the doings of the Coronation night, and the Palace Inn yet held its head high as beseemed its historic state. The open space in front was enlivened by the newly-painted London stage-coach, the Lord Nelson, the fresh scarlet coats of

coachmen and guards, the assembling of passengers and luggage, the shouting and swearing of half-awake ostlers and porters, the grumbling of the first-comers (shivering in the raw air) at the unpunctuality of the stage, the excuses of the booking-clerk, the self-gratulations of the last arrival that he was "in time," the dragging of trunks and portmanteaus on to the top, the thrusting of bags and boxes into the boot, the harnessing of snorting steeds, the horsing of the vehicle, the scramble of the "outsiders" to the top by the ladder and wheel, the self-satisfied settlement of the "insides" in the places they had "booked for," the crushing and thrusting of friends with last messages and parting words, the crack of the whip, the sound of the bugle, the prancing of horses, the rattle of wheels, and the dashing off up Market Street Lane of the gallant four-in-hand amid the hurrahs of excited spectators.

Every morning witnessed a somewhat similar scene of bustle and excitement at five

o'clock, when the London coach started, but every morning did not see Jabez mounted on the box-seat with the coachman. Nor did every morning see the coach an hour behind time, or the driver's face quite so red, or the spectators so heavy-eyed, or so much handing up of horns and glasses to the passengers, to be returned empty, or leave Mr. Ashton standing there when the Lord Nelson had bowled away.

That Coronation day had much to answer for.

When Tom Hulme should have risen at four o'clock to return home, his bruised limbs were so stiff and sore that the soldier, who had borne the fatigue of many a campaign, who had bivouacked on the battle-field after a forced march, and been ready with the sun for the day's duties, had to confess himself "fettled" by Lancashire clogs, and unable to stir. There was no alternative but to acquaint Mr. Ashton.

The mill could not be left without a manager.

After the night's unwonted dissipation, Mr. Ashton slept heavily, and was with difficulty roused. When once he comprehended the state of affairs, he was on the alert.

"It's a bad business!" said he to his wife as he dressed in haste.

"There is nothing so bad, but it might be worse," was her consolatory reply. "Never bewail a loss till you have done your best to repair it. Can you not send Mr. Clegg to Whaley-Bridge for a few days?"

"My dear, your counsel is invaluable, but I fear there is not time to catch the coach; it is twenty minutes past four now."

"It is sure to be late this morning, and Jabez will catch it if it is to be caught," was her quick rejoinder.

Bess had already awakened Jabez, and he, fully dressed, met Mr. Ashton at his bed-

room door with "Can I be of any service, sir?" A prompt commentary on Mrs. Ashton's declaration.

A few necessaries hastily crammed into a carpet bag; a bowl of milk and a crust of bread as hastily swallowed; and Jabez, accompanied by Mr. Ashton, was on his way to the Palace coach-office confident they were in time, not having heard the guard's bugle, or met the coach. There was, however, barely time to claim for Mr. Clegg the place already booked for "Mr. Hulme" (Mrs. Hulme's seat was forfeited), and for him to take his seat, before they were off in a canter, and Mr. Ashton's business mind was relieved.

As the manufacturer, satisfied that the mill-hands at Whaley-Bridge would not be left altogether to their own devices, stood within a short distance of the high steps looking after the vanishing coach, a party of roisterers came swaggering out of the inn, hallooing with all their tipsy might. One

in advance of the rest, observing an elderly gentleman below, pointed him out to his companions as fair game, and leaning over the rail to steady himself, cried out—

"Halloo, old fogey! are you a Tory or a Radical? D—— me, take your hat off before gentlemen!" and, suiting the action to the word, extended a riding-whip he carried, and jerked Mr. Ashton's hat off into the dust; whereupon his worthy comrades set up a loud guffaw in admiration of the feat.

Naturally Mr. Ashton, his brief reverie disturbed, stooped to pick up the fallen beaver, and making due allowance for the unwonted occasion, turned to remonstrate good-humouredly with an excited stranger who had evidently drunk the king's health too frequently.

It was not with more surprise than annoyance that he recognised four of the hilarious party in the doorway and on the steps of the inn, which had apparently been

open the night through. Not one of the four was in a condition to recognise him, although two of them, John Walmsley and Laurence Aspinall, had supped overnight at his own table; although the third, Kit Townley, had good reason for remembrance, and Ned Barret was anything but a stranger.

Loud laughter hailed the fall of the hat. A second attempt to "uncover the obstinate old fogey" was made, but dexterously avoided by Mr. Ashton in his absolute astonishment stepping backward beyond range.

"Young gentlemen, do you know whom you are insulting?"

There was another laughing chorus. Aspinall almost toppled over the rail as he leaned forward, impotently striking out with his whip.

"I protest the old rad's demnibly li—ike the lovely Augusta's snuffy old dad," drawled out he, in a sort of tipsy-wisdom.

"Just so!" appended Walmsley, mimicking the old gentleman's peculiarity.

Mr. Ashton, though a reasonably temperate man himself, was not so greatly shocked at these young carousers as we might be. Long usage blunts sensibilities. It was a glorious distinction to be a three-bottle man; the inability to drink a solitary bottle of wine at a sitting was a sort of disqualification for good-fellowship; and it was considered a fine thing for a boy of seven to "toss off a glass like a man;" so the genial old gentleman was inclined to allow some latitude for the special occasion. But they had touched him on a tender point. The light mention of his darling daughter's name roused his blood.

"John Walmsley," he cried angrily, looking up, "what brings you, a married man, with these young rakes at this hour of the morning?"

"Pray wha-at brought y-you here, old

fogey?" hiccoughed Aspinall, answering for the other.

One of the ostlers—Bob, the ex-groom—squeezed between the rollicking fellows to whisper in the ear of Laurence. He was impatiently thrust back with an elbow.

"Tchut! don't believe it. Old snuff-an'-tuppenny's fast 'shleep in bed shure sh a gun. I know b-better. I say, you——"

But "old snuff-an'-tuppenny" had turned on his heel, too wise to enter into contention with a set of inebriated boobies, though not proof against the disrespectful epithets of Laurence, or the derisive laughter of his boon companions. His irritation half emptied his snuff-box before he got home, so often he tapped smartly on its golden lid, and so often his finger and thumb travelled between it and his nose with a touch of ruminant displeasure.

Neither he nor Mrs. Ashton was disposed to overlook the fact that Kit Townley and Ned Barret—scapegraces by repute—were

of the party, nor that Augusta's name had been familiarly used in their midst.

"'Birds of a feather flock together,'" said the lady; "and if Mr. Aspinall's son associates with that reckless and dishonest Kit Townley, he is a very unfit friend for John Walmsley, and still worse for our dear Augusta."

"Just so; for a dashing blade with a handsome face, who sports a uniform, talks poetry, and sings sentimental songs, is just the fellow to take a silly girl's fancy, before she is old enough to think. I know I regret I ever brought him *here*," said Mr. Ashton seriously, as Augusta came in the room to breakfast, entering at the door behind her mother's back.

"Well, William," observed Mrs. Ashton loftily, her hand on the china coffee-pot, "you can imagine *my* annoyance when John and Mr. Laurence walked in arm-in-arm last night, after the liberty he had taken in the morning—kissing his hand to

our daughter from the public procession in the face of all our friends, as if Augusta had been a flaunting barmaid. I was most indignant!"

Augusta said "Good morning," and took her seat with a heightened colour. Such a construction of the gallant officer's salute had not occurred to her, and native delicacy took alarm.

Mrs. Ashton continued to pour out her thoughts along with the coffee. It was fit Augusta should know her sentiments on this head.

"It would have been a breach of hospitality to resent it before our friends, and not good policy either. But I shall put a stop to his visits henceforth."

"Oh! mamma," exclaimed Augusta, dropping her hands at this climax, "you cannot mean that!"

"Yes, my dear, I do. If Mr. Aspinall has depraved associates, he must be depraved himself; and I am sure my daughter"

—she drew herself up proudly—"would not choose her friends from those of Christopher Townley."

Augusta's colour suffered no decrease. She paused as she was taking her dry toast from the silver rack, and half-hesitatingly remonstrated.

"Of course I should not wish to associate with Mr. Townley's friends. But papa may be mistaken. I do not think Mr. Aspinall would mix with them. People meet and mingle at coach-offices who are strangers."

"Just so, my dear; but——" interposed her father.

"Why, mamma," the persistent young lady went on, "no more perfect gentleman enters our doors than Mr. Laurence Aspinall. His manners are most refined. Then he talks enchantingly, and sings divinely. And" —this she thought conclusive—"is he not intimate with Charlotte and John?"

"Just so," quickly answered Mr. Ashton, glancing across the table at his attentive

wife, "and all the worse for Charlotte and John. I shall have a word with them on the subject. I called in Marsden Square on my way home, and found Charlotte with red eyes. John had not been home all night." And Mr. Ashton battered the top of an egg whilst delivering what he regarded as a crushing argument.

Breakfast and the discussion were unusually prolonged, the only impression left on the yonng lady's romantic, impressible, and inexperienced mind being that her parents were unaccountably harsh to her, and unjust to Mr. Laurence, in her eyes the beau-ideal of a man. Such a figure and such a face could only enshrine divinity. And if he was a little wild, so were all heroes at his age.

Let not the inexperienced young girl be over-much condemned for this. The opinion generally prevailed in her day; she had heard the sentiment expressed in farces on the stage, in society at home and elsewhere;

even her own father's hospitality trended in the same direction.

Mrs. Ashton was a woman of her word. The door in Mosley Street was closed against Mr. Laurence Aspinall, and James was incorruptible.

But the teaching of Miss Bohanna's library being that Love was far-seeing and parents were blind, it followed that Miss Augusta (who would have resented any supposition of wilful disobedience or intentional disrespect towards the good father and mother she loved so dearly) met the fascinating gentleman (always by chance) either at her cousin's in Marsden Square or in her walks abroad, and scented billet-doux came and went between the leaves of four-volumed romances, which Cicily carried to and from the library. One of these fell into Mrs. Ashton's hands, when finding her advice contemned, she took measures to check this premature and clandestine love-making, as she thought, effectually.

CHAPTER III.

AT CARR COTTAGE.

TOM HULME was most anxious to get back to Whaley-Bridge and the mill, and motherly Bess was equally uneasy to return to her poor little Sim, afraid lest he should tax his grandfather's strength overmuch, or meet with some fresh accident. Yet more than a week elapsed before her husband was fit to travel, and in the interim Mr. Ashton had himself gone thither to ascertain how the new substitute filled the post.

He was still at Carr Cottage when the "Lord Nelson" stopped at the end of the avenue, and Jabez, with fragile Sim mounted

on his shoulder, trotted down to the gate to welcome Bess and her invalid home. They had travelled inside, but John Loudon Mac-Adam had not yet been appointed "Surveyor of Roads," and Tom Hulme had suffered severely from the jolting of the coach.

Bess clasped her child tenderly and held him up for his father's kiss; but she put him down to walk on before them (he could not run), whilst she and Jabez helped the injured corporal to ascend the steep incline. Old Simon, who seemed to have got a new lease of life from the invigorating country air and occupation, had already breakfasted, and was in the bean-field gathering the first ripe pods for a dinner of beans and bacon.

"Eh, Tum, lad!" said he, as he entered the house-place, and saw his son-in-law's pale face against the blue-and-white check cover of the arm-chair, "whoi, thi feace is as whoite as a clout! Thah'll noan be fit

to wark fur one whoile. Thah's nobbut fit fur t' sit under th' sycymoore tree, an' look at th' fleawers, an' watch me put th' garden i' fettle."

"Just so," said Mr. Ashton, bringing his pleasant face in at the door; "I think Mr. Clegg will have to do duty for you a while longer. And don't distress yourself about it, Mr. Hulme, for I fancy a little fresh air will do *him* no harm this hot weather; he has been overworking lately, and does not look too brisk."

"You are very kind, sir," responded Jabez, "but I trust a few days' rest will set Mr. Hulme on his feet again." He said nothing of himself.

But Tom Hulme had received unsuspected internal injuries, and many weeks went by before he was stout as before—weeks pregnant with fate for Jabez; and not Jabez alone.

Factory hours were long, but the Summer days were longer, and he was glad after

work was over to ramble away through the valley of the Goyt, following the winding of the stream, or over the larch-clad hills above Taxal, whence he would return with the rising moon, bringing pockets full of the crisp brown fir-cones for Sim to play with. In the pine-woods, alone with nature, he could give vent to his emotions, or indulge in meditation at his will.

Mr. Ashton, however, found him other occupation for his spare hours. The landlord of the "White Hart," bearing in mind that Mr. Clegg had come under his roof first as a travelling artist, had expatiated to Mr. Ashton with much pathos on the deplorable condition of the inn sign, not without sundry broad hints that Mr. Clegg's temporary residence on the spot was a glorious opportunity not to be neglected. Mr. Ashton had smiled, said "Just so," taken a pinch from the immense snuff-box lying on the bar-parlour chimneypiece, then fallen back upon his own, gone away, and forgot the dingy

sign altogether, until another hint from his tenant refreshed his memory.

As he stood at the inn door waiting for the Manchester coach, an upward sly glance of the jolly host's caused him to say to the young man by his side, "Do you think you could manage to paint a new sign for the 'White Hart,' to oblige Chapman and me?"

Jabez hesitated, not from unwillingness.

"I'm afraid, sir, to attempt. It's not in my line, and——"

"Oh! you can do it well enough. Remember the banner."

"I've no materials here, sir, else——"

"If that's all, you shall have them in a day or two."

In a few days an easel, a new sign-board, and colours were sent by the Manchester and Buxton carrier, and Jabez set to work to the especial wonder and admiration of little Sim, who delighted to stand by his side, and grew rebellious when "bed-time" was announced. Jabez was, however, but an

untaught artist, and his painting hours were few; the *couchant* hart was rubbed in and wiped out over and over again before he was satisfied even with the outline; but then it grew in fair proportion under his brush, until he felt there was something in him beyond the region of tapes and braces.

The graceful animal, resplendent in golden collar and chain, looked mildly out from the easel in the parlour nearest to the passage (used, when the family was there, as an eating room), and little Sim gravely reported to his elders it only wanted "gass, an' tee, an' ky," when the inmates of Carr Cottage were startled by the arrival of unexpected visitors.

It was the second week in August; the air was heavy with the perfume of clove carnations, honeysuckle, mignonette, lavender, musk, and mint. Golden sunflower and crimson hollyhock were in their glory; bees and wasps hovered over balsams and China asters, or hid themselves in the blue

Canterbury bells or the amber nectary of the stately white lily. Fruits were ripe for the gatherer, grain was falling under the sickle. Bess, in a fair white muslin cap, a large check apron over her dark chocolate-and-white print gown (her blue bed-gown days were over), was moving quietly about the house-place, preparing their early breakfast, no longer restricted to oatmeal porridge.

Tom, looking worn, but clean and neat as loving hands could make him, leaned back in his soft arm-chair, and watched her with well-satisfied eyes. Little Sim was already in the garden with his grandfather, helping to pick raspberries and currants for preserving.

The tall oak-cased clock struck seven, and then, true to time, the guard's bugle announced the coming of the coach from Manchester. Instinctively Bess went to the door, as was her wont, when the coach

came in. She uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Eh, Tum! aw declare t' coach is stoppin' at ar gate! Happen theere's a parcel or summat for ar Jabez."

And off she set past the kitchen window and the farm-yard Gothic doorway, and down the avenue, with the light foot of a younger woman. Before she reached the avenue gate, the stuffy vehicle had yielded up three ladies and two bandboxes, and the guard having unlocked the capacious boot (a kind of closet at the back), dragged thence, with much superfluous puffing and straining, two hair trunks of moderate dimensions. Yes, there stood Mrs. Ashton, grandly calm; bright-haired Augusta, tall, slim, and, it must be added, unamiably silent; and Ellen Chadwick, whose black eyes had an absolute glow of expectancy in their depths. Bess put up her hand in amazement.

"Eh! Mrs. Ashton, madam! Yo' han

taken us unawares! An' theere is na a bit o' flesh meat i' th' heawse; an' th' butcher's cart wunna be reawnd agen till Setterday! But awm downreet glad to see yo' an' th' young ladies" (she dropped a respectful curtsey) "an a' lookin' so weel. Aw wur afeard yo' wur no' comin' this Summer."

"Never mind the butcher's meat, Mrs. Hulme; having come to Carr we must do as Carr does; I do not doubt we shall fare very well," said the stately lady, reassuringly. "I trust we shall find your good husband free from pain, and Mr. Clegg and your family in health."

Bess thanked Mrs. Ashton for her kind inquiries, but somehow she boggled over the "Mr. Clegg." She was proud enough of his advancement, but to her he was still "Jabez;" and he did not seek to be otherwise.

There was a difficulty about the luggage, no men being about. By this time old Simon was nearly down the hill, little Sim

following at his heels, his face, hands, and pinafore stained with fruit.

"I run for Joe," cried crippled Sim, as Bess tried the weight of a trunk, and Ellen interposed. Run indeed! It was the very travestie of a run!

"Well, yo' see as heaw o' Moore's folk are eawt i' th' fields cuttin' whoats [oats]. Feyther an' me con carry one on em atween us. They're noän so heavy."

Mrs. Ashton would not hear of it. Just then little Sim came back with Joe—his most particular friend, to whom he was chief patron—a drivelling idiot, a man in frame, a child in heart and brain. He was a pitiable object, the scoff of the rabble, but he had sense enough to know his protectors. At the instance of the four-years-old child, he shouldered the box with a vacant chuckle; and Sim, loaded with an oval pasteboard bandbox half as big as himself, waddled after him as fast as his deformity would permit.

Before the travellers could reach the top of the avenue Jabez Clegg was with them, the other trunk upon his shoulder. He had heard at the "White Hart" of their arrival, and had almost sacrificed the dignity of his position in *his* desire to run.

There were more greetings, accompanied by a cordial shaking of hands; and Bess and Simon looking on saw with pleasure, not unmixed with pain, that the foundling they had adopted and reared had mounted far above their heads, albeit in rising he had drawn them up too.

He breakfasted not with them in the house-place, but with the new-comers in the parlour; and Bess herself waited upon them, Meg, her little maid, being off in the harvest field gleaning for a bed-ridden mother.

She heard him conversing freely, if deferentially, with the lofty Mrs. Ashton on topics and in a language her provincial tongue could never compass. She saw him turn to answer the arch sallies of Miss Ash-

ton, and the quieter observations of Miss Chadwick, and noted that the dark eyes of the latter kindled when he spoke, and her cheeks had a warmer glow, as if they caught their hue from the flushed face of Jabez.

Breakfast over—little Sim had sat on the door-step to share his with Crazy Joe,—whilst Ellen and Augusta retired to unpack, —Mrs. Ashton graciously accepted the escort of Mr. Clegg to the mill, and they trod the avenue and the high-road side by side, discussing business matters, her dignity losing no whit by the companionship. Mrs. Ashton was one of those who can lift up without stooping.

Clouds never lingered on Augusta's face; she had been transported thither, as she said, "with no more ceremony than a bale of twist," but she put off her displeasure with her travelling bonnet, and danced into the kitchen airily as a sylph, to help Bess out of the quandary caused by their advent.

"I am afraid our arrival has been very

inauspicious," Augusta said, "but I can assure you I was not consulted, and am not to blame" (she had certainly not been consulted—blame was another matter). "And now what can I do for you, Mrs. Hulme?"

Augusta tucked up the sleeves of her peach-coloured gingham dress, borrowed a linen apron from Bess, who confessed to being "raythor a heavy hond at paste," and soon the matron was at ease respecting pies, and tarts and custards. Simon Clegg brought in a dish of trout fresh from the stream; the larder supplied savoury ham and eggs, the garden furnished peas; so Mrs. Ashton was not far wrong.

It was but a spurt on Augusta's part; her tender impressionable heart had melted at Mrs. Hulme's first look of dismay, but, the impulse over, there was no more tucking up of sleeves or handling of paste pins. Fortunately for their digestion, Ellen Chadwick had no less skill, since, quiet as she was, she seemed to lack an outlet for superabundant

energy, and, obtrusively restless, helped Bess she hardly knew how, or how much.

Augusta wandered about cottage and garden, or sat for hours under the shade of the great sycamore tree, singing low-voiced plaintive ditties; feeling herself the most ill-used and wretched being in existence, separated from her adorable lover; and the more she brooded, the more discontented and melancholy she became. It was all very real and very much to be deplored. No knife cuts so keenly at the heart-strings as the sharp edge of a first love turned in upon itself; and Augusta was as much in love as ever was maiden of seventeen.

Mrs. Ashton went daily to the mill, but a casual remark of Mrs. Hulme's on "Miss Ashton's mopin' an' malancholy" aroused the attention of the energetic mother, and she did her best to counteract morbid fancies with long sharp walks in the early morning (extending, on one occasion, as far as Shawcross Hall, where she astonished

her relatives by an informal visit), and a repetition of the dose in the evening, when Mr. Clegg made one of the party, thus unconsciously adding fuel to the fires which, unknown to her, consumed alike her niece and her warehouseman.

At the end of ten days, Mrs. Ashton returned to Manchester, leaving the girls behind. She had extorted a promise from Augusta that she would not write to Mr. Laurence Aspinall, and relied on that promise being faithfully kept. Moreover, after some debate with herself, as they walked from the mill together on the last afternoon of her stay, she committed her daughter and niece to Jabez Clegg's care.

"You are a very young man for so important a charge," she said, "but you are steady as old Time, and of your integrity and fidelity we have had many proofs. Miss Ashton's health demands a prolonged stay on this breezy hill-side, but I fear she feels it dull after Manchester. If you will en-

deavour to amuse her when you see her drooping, I shall consider myself your debtor, sir; and should anything *unusual* attract your notice, I depend on your calling our attention to it."

"I feel honoured by the trust you repose in me, madam," replied he, a grave consciousness of his own danger stirring at his heart; "you may depend on my watchfulness over Miss Ashton and her cousin."

But of any danger to Miss Ashton beyond that arising from a sensitively delicate frame, which might need the sudden summons of Dr. Hull to allay the fears of parents anxious for their only child, he had no suspicion or perception. He had no more clue to Mrs. Ashton's hidden meaning than she to his secret emotions. It had been wiser to have been more explicit. Without that charge he might have made it a point of honour, if not of duty, to hold aloof from the young ladies lest he should be obtrusive: as it was, the more he pondered, the more

he became satisfied that it was only a delicate way of giving sanction to a companionship he might otherwise have regarded as presumptuous.

Accordingly, he constituted himself their cavalier after business hours, fulfilling to the letter his instructions to endeavour to amuse Augusta whenever he found her drooping, well rewarded if he could win back a smile or a peal of the rippling laughter he had heard so oft in her school-girl days. His attentions to Miss Chadwick were tinctured with the profoundest respect, but there was no effort to entertain or be agreeable; on the contrary, it was Miss Chadwick who kept the light shafts of her cousin's wit within bounds when they were likely to wound—as they did sometimes.

The White Hart, to Sim's disquiet, would have suffered long from dearth of herbage, had not thunderous clouds emptied their reservoirs amongst the hills, until brooks became rivers, and roads almost impassable.

Then Jabez resumed his brush, Sim clapped his thin little hands with delight, whilst the sedate young lady of twenty-four, and the bewitching damsel of sweet seventeen, varied the monotony of piano, book, or embroidery-frame, with an occasional criticism of his work.

It was a time fraught with intoxicating delight, but of terrible temptation to Jabez. The frequent fits of languor which bowed Augusta down like a drooping lily, made her only more dangerously dear to him, and it needed all his strength to remember that she was his master's daughter, and confided to his care. If he now thought of Laurence Aspinall and his fascination, it was only as a butterfly beau, for whom no sensible maiden could entertain a permanent liking. Not even when, turning back one forenoon for something in the closet which he had forgotten, he found her in tears on the low ledge of the open window at the foot of the staircase.

"Good heavens, Miss Ashton, what is the matter? Are you ill? Is anything troubling you?"

"Nothing," sobbed she, the clear drops falling faster.

"Nothing! oh, Miss Ashton, this cannot be for nothing," and he sat down on the window-ledge beside her, not daring so much as to touch her hand, his own were in such a quiver.

"Miss Ashton—Augusta, you told me your troubles when you were a school-girl, am I less worthy your confidence now? Can I do anything to serve you? I would lay my life down to save you from pain;" and the earnest tenderness of his voice spoke volumes.

She had subdued her emotion. Gathering herself up with a reflex of her mother's stateliness, she said haughtily, "It is nothing, sir; I am better," and swept past him up the staircase, leaving him to set his teeth and turn away with clenched hands, alike

exasperated at his own loss of self-command and grieved for her grief.

On the narrow landing which ran parallel with the staircase like a balcony, Augusta found her cousin Ellen, with one hand on her side, leaning against the chamber door-post, as if for support, with closed eyes and pale lips. She had been "overcome by the heat"—so she said.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOVERS' WALK.

JABEZ held a responsible post, and had no more leisure than other business men for emotional indulgence. He hurried out of the cottage, and down the avenue, shutting up his bitter feelings within the doors of his heart as he went. But the process closed his eyes and ears to external sounds, and the old postman, with his long tin horn, which had been echoing through the straggling village a full quarter of an hour, passed him in the avenue and said, "Good day," without so much as arresting his attention.

At the mill he found letters waiting—one, which had been post-paid as a double

letter, conspicuous amongst the wafered business communications, not only because of its thick, gilt-edged paper, and crimson disk of crested wax, but from its curious folding, as if to baffle prying eyes.

It was signed "Ben Travis," and was so long, it went into a pantaloon pocket, to be read when his multifarious duties allowed him more leisure.

When the hands were dismissed at noon, and the one clerk had left the counting-house, he took out the voluminous epistle, which was dated September 10th, and certainly found therein matter of interest. Amongst a few preliminary items of news, he learned that the excesses of the Coronation night had created so much disgust in the minds of thinking men that many of those who had denounced Henry Hunt's advocacy of abstinence, and at the public expense had formerly disseminated printed laudations of good brown ale, the "old English beverage," as "a cheering and

strengthening drink," no longer branded the water-drinkers as "enemies to the corporeal constitution of Englishmen," but had given their countenance to social gatherings whence intoxicating liquors were excluded. Travis himself was doing what he could to promote these temperate meetings, and looked for the earnest co-operation of Mr. Clegg on his return to Manchester. (And he did not look in vain; though neither of the young social reformers saw in advance how universal would become the temperance movement of which this was the unpretending precursor.)

The letter went on to say—

"Miss Chadwick and her fair cousin were spirited away mysteriously. At first I blamed myself as the unhappy cause. I have since discovered my mistake, through a quarrel between Mr. Walmsley and Mr. Laurence Aspinall, when both were slaves to Bacchus—*In vino veritas!* I suppose you know that Mr. Aspinall the elder is a

martyr to the gout, and has been driven by his enemy to the Buxton baths. The cause, I have heard, was a gentlemanly debauch in a fit of passion or wounded pride. His son joins him to-day. I scarcely think he will call on your young ladies after what has occurred."

"What has occurred!" repeated Jabez, "what can he mean by that? I wish correspondents would be more explicit!"

He pondered over this sentence, but could make nothing of it, and after reading a little way, came to the real object of the letter, prefaced as it was with much circumlocution.

"It may seem strange that a great, big, burly fellow like myself should be such a booby as to seek the intervention of a third person in an affair of the heart. Yet, if I have any insight into your nature, I think I may confide in you, and depend on your good offices. After so many months' dangling and craven hesitation, I summoned up

courage to make my pretensions known to Miss Chadwick. I know I did it clumsily and ungracefully: the very strength of my passion fettered my tongue. I shall never forget the pitiful look of the sweet girl as she burst into tears, assured me of her esteem, but declined my suit. Her tears unnerved me, and I had not power to plead my own cause. Do not despise me, Clegg: neither Samson nor Hercules was any stronger. I cannot resign myself to that verdict. I would throw myself again at Ellen's feet, and beseech her pity, but that I dread its repetition. Can I count on your good offices to move her in my behalf? I know the value Miss Chadwick sets on your opinion, and how highly she esteems you, or I should not think of asking this. The trust I repose in you is the best proof I can give of friendship. Do not hesitate to tell me the worst. I trust I am brave enough to bear my fate—when I know it. Mrs. Chad-

wick does not believe her daughter's decision final."

This was a disquieting letter. Mr. Travis had been his firm, true friend, in spite of difference in position and fortune. He had overlooked that difference from the first, but would Miss Chadwick, his employer's niece, overlook it, if he stepped beyond privileged bounds? From the depths of his own conscious heart he felt for his friend, but how to approach so delicate a subject to serve him was perplexing. He never thought of shirking the trust.

It was late when he got home to dinner. Ellen and Bess were both on the look-out for him. He quickened his pace, fearing some evil to his beloved Augusta, whom he had last seen in tears.

"What an anomaly is woman!" he thought, as he found her fingers rattling over the keys of her piano in accompaniment to the merriest ditty he had heard from her lips since she was a child.

There was a strange sparkle in her eyes, a vivacity in her manner so opposed to her sadness that he asked himself if he had been dreaming before, or was dreaming then. She blushed over her willow-pattern plate as she took her seat, but, after that first token of susceptibility, chatted with a volubility unusual to her, and curiously in contradiction to the silence and reserve of Ellen Chadwick. In the morning he had debated whether that secret trouble came within the category of "unusual" things Mrs. Ashton required to be informed of, and, behold! it was gone!

She rallied both Jabez and Ellen on their gravity, and at length, as if on a sudden inspiration, asked, playing with her green-handled, two-pronged fork—

"Shall you be very busy at the mill this afternoon, Mr. Clegg?"

It was an unusual question. He answered:

"Rather. Some bales of twist have

come in from Messrs. Evans, of Darley-Abbey Mills. I must see them unpacked, and compare the twist with samples. But —your motive for asking?"

"Oh, if you are busy——Well, perhaps after tea will be better; it will be cooler. I wish you would just take Ellen a good long walk; I found her fainting with the heat this morning."

Ellen coloured vividly.

"Augusta!" she remonstrated.

"And yourself, Miss Ashton?" questioned he.

"Oh, I have a heap of clear-starching to do. My frills and laces are in a woeful plight. I shall be clap-clap-clap all the afternoon, and this sultry weather prohibits ironing until there is a cool evening breeze to fan me through the window. Without it I should be as likely to faint as Ellen."

Miss Chadwick made light of her faintness, and objected, if not too strenuously, to be so disposed of; but Augusta, in her old

wilful way, insisted, and Jabez, with his friend's letter on his mind, was not likely to throw opposition in the way. So, notwithstanding his recent rebuff, he was once more "Miss Ashton's humble servant to command."

After an early tea, which was but a fiction to all three, Augusta was left behind, busy with a box-iron and her ladylike laundry of lace and muslin in the house-place, whilst Ellen Chadwick and Jabez went rambling with the winding waters of the translucent Goyt, under umbrageous trees on pleasant mountain slopes, where foxgloves nodded, and horse-tail grasses bent before them, and only an occasional reaper or gleaner crossed their path.

Had these two been incipient lovers, no more embarrassing silence could have fallen upon them. If Jabez, her junior by two years, had had a tussle to keep his love within bounds, there had at least been a glimmer of hope in the distance, and the

struggle was upwards. Ellen had been trained from her childhood to keep her naturally strong feelings under control ; but there was a war in her breast between maidenly shame and unsought, hopeless love, and the two hacked at each other and at her heart in the rayless dark, and the struggle was downwards.

Here she was, for the first time, alone with the man she loved with all the strength of a strong heart, with the newly-gained knowledge that he "would die to save her cousin pain;" and he, conscious of a sacred and delicate mission, all unaware of her secret love for himself, was perplexed how best to approach the subject, and take advantage of the opportunity so afforded him. At length—

"I had a letter from my friend, Captain Travis, to-day," he began.

With little perceptible emotion, she replied,

"Indeed ! I hope he was in good health.

You are honoured in your friendship, sir. Mr. Travis is a noble gentleman, and I esteem him highly."

This paved the way for him to expatiate on Ben Travis's many good qualities. He told the story of the big, raw-boned youth's first patronage of himself, and found an attentive listener as he traced the growth of their friendship upwards, and related favourable anecdotes which have no place in this history. But no sooner did he begin to plead his friend's cause with all the warmth of young friendship than her manner entirely changed. Her colour came and went; she panted as if for breath, and gasping out, "Oh—h! Mr. Clegg, for mercy's sake, don't —don't!" was seized with a sudden faintness for the second time that day.

A lichen-covered old tree-trunk, shattered and uptorn in the late thunder-storms, was at hand; he seated her upon it, bringing water to revive her from a runnel near; but any attempt to renew the subject only seemed

to give her exquisite pain, and he desisted on her telling him, in a suffocating voice,

"Honour forbids that I should listen to Mr. Travis; I—I—love another."

Something in her tone or manner told him that her love was as hopeless as his own for Augusta; and nothing could be more respectful and gentle than his bearing towards her on their homeward way, thus adding fuel to the fire which consumed her.

The evening shadows were fast closing in when they reached the cottage; and she, with a simple inclination of the head, left Jabez on the threshold, and passing through the parlours, carried her overmastering emotions upwards to her room, to be grappled with in the silence of the night.

"Wheere's Miss Ashton?" asked Bess. "Hoo said it wur too hot to bide i' th' heawse an' hoo put her irons deawn, an' efter titti-vatin' hersel' oop a bit, went eawt a-seekin' yo'."

In some surprise, not unmixed with alarm,

for the hour was late—as times and country went—and the harvest brought rough strangers into the neighbourhood, Jabez set off at full speed down the avenue, and ere he had reached the first brook, saw her lithe figure advancing buoyantly; and, if his eyes and the gathering mist did not deceive him, a second figure parted from her at the gate.

She was the first to speak. "Whichever way did you people ramble off?"

"Oh, down by the Goyt, Taxal way, Miss Ashton," answered Jabez.

"Ah! and I went up the Buxton Road; we were certain to miss."

"I thought I saw you part from some one at the gate? Could I be mistaken?" half questioned her interlocutor.

"Oh, Crazy Joe! that was all!" and he took her reply in all sincerity, not believing Augusta Ashton capable of untruth.

A day or two went by, during which Jabez wrote to tell Ben Travis he "must arm himself with fortitude"—that "the world

was full of disappointments"—that "Miss Chadwick loved elsewhere"—but there was "something more for men to do than die for disappointments or blighted love."

And yet another day or two, during which Augusta's moods were as variable as the gusty shadows of the sycamore; changing from wild exuberance which rallied Ellen on her depression, and condescended to play or dance for Sim, to a moping, moody melancholy, enlivened by frequent showers. She was given to snatch up her hat and "run out into the garden for a breath of fresh air," but she generally came in panting as if the "run" had been literal; and sometimes she would be found in the house when supposed out of it, and *vice versâ*.

The White Hart had not yet walked away, although Jabez considered it complete. It waited Mr. Ashton's coming and his verdict, and stood on the easel in the dining-room.

The morning post had brought a message to Simon Clegg concerning fruit and vegetables for the Manchester home, and having sought him in the kitchen-garden to deliver it, Jabez entered the house at dinner time by the lower staircase window (frequently used for entrance and exit). His passage through the best parlour was arrested by voices in the room beyond, one of which he knew too well. It was that of Laurence Aspinall. His painting was evidently under free criticism, and had been for some time. There was some jesting at the sign-painter.

"You see, Miss Ashton, what a few touches can effect!"

The speaker had apparently made free with Clegg's colours and brushes, and there was a murmured sound of assent from Miss Ashton.

"Well, Barret, *Nec scire fas est omnia; Ne sutor ultra crepidam.* What say you?"

"Yes; let the cobbler stick to his last.

If this Clegg would be an artist, let him stick to his brush; if a tradesman, let him stick to his trade. If a man means to succeed he must never flirt with either art or trade. It's just as bad as wooing two women at once."

Jabez heard no more. The blow which had been aimed at his art-pretensions drove him back by the way he came, and he placed the long terrace parallel with the "Lovers' Walk" for fully half-an-hour. When he turned the corner of the cottage, and went in at the front door, the critics were gone, but Aspinall's "few touches" remained. They had indeed given life to the White Hart. Henceforth the "cobbler" resolved to "stick to his last!"

Ellen Chadwick had been away, with little Sim by the hand, to take some substantial comforts to Meg's bedridden mother. She appeared annoyed when she heard of their masculine visitors from Buxton. Her evident displeasure set Jabez wondering

what Travis meant by "after what has occurred," and he wrote that afternoon for enlightenment, sending his letter as a packet by coach, there being no second post.

It has been said that the cellarage of the cottage was only accessible by flights of steps in the portion of the weed-grown Lovers' Walk which lay at the windowless back of the long low building, where nettles grew so thick and rank that even the square unused trap over one set of steps was half hidden by them. The path was rarely used, the farmer having made a nearer cut from the farmyard to his ancient dwelling.

Tom Hulme was slowly recovering, under the care of a Buxton doctor who came thrice a week. He could walk about the garden with a stick, but there was no sending him to the dank cellar for anything. The doctor had ordered him port wine, and Bess, who kept the key, had asked Mr. Clegg to fetch a couple of bottles from the cellar.

Tea was over, but he fancied there was sufficient light to guide him without a lantern. He had got the wine and was approaching the cellar door at the foot of the sunken steps when he heard the sound of voices coming along the walk from the direction of the moor.

Every pulse in his body seemed to grow still as he recognised the tones of Augusta Ashton and Laurence Aspinall, and heard with deepening anguish the unmistakable sound of kisses interchanged. They had apparently paused close to the stair-head for that embrace; and then he heard—and thanked God that he was there to hear, though that hearing blighted every hope he had—his rival, with every argument which passionate love or skilful sophistry could employ, persuade her to elope with him the following night.

Backwards and forwards they walked in the gathering dusk, but never beyond the length of the premises; and now and then

they stopped, and drove him mad with their caresses. The place was so retired and lonely, precaution was neglected ; and Jabez, chained to the spot as it were, gathered that proposals for her hand, made by Laurence himself, had been peremptorily rejected by Mr. Ashton, who was set down as a despot and a tyrant for refusing to surrender a silly girl of seventeen to a rake of two-and-twenty. He heard her tell that Jabez Clegg had found her sobbing at the separation, even whilst her darling's letter was at the gates. And he heard it said that the elder Aspinall not only countenanced this secret courtship, but had furnished funds for the proposed elopement. This generosity was set against the cruelty of her own parents ; her affection, her pride, the romance in her nature were appealed to, but still Augusta's better angel held her safe, until, coward that he was, Laurence terrified her with a threat to "blow his brains out" if she refused him.

She wept her assent upon his breast, and then Jabez, already half-stunned, heard the details of evidently previously concocted arrangements for their elopement and marriage at Gretna Green, professedly with his father's sanction.

CHAPTER V.

A RIDE ON A RAINY NIGHT.

JABEZ, bottles in hand, his mind a chaos, had walked in at the wash-kitchen door precisely as Augusta, stealthily creeping through a gap in the privet-hedge, made her way to the convenient staircase-window, shivering more from fright than from the chill drizzling rain which had begun to fall. Putting her head in at the parlour-door where Ellen was sewing, with a brief "I'm off to bed," she hurried up-stairs in the dusk to lave her flushed face, smoothe her disordered hair, crush it under a night-cap, and place her head on a pillow, to still her heart's flutterings under the screening

counterpane, and hide her emotions from her cousin under the semblance of sleep, though sleep was an absolute impossibility.

In 1821 the village of Gretna Green, on the Scottish border, was the general resort of runaway lovers, who, being in their minority, could not be married legally in England without parental consent, whereas in Caledonia a mere promise to marry made in the presence of witnesses was held binding. At Gretna a man not in holy orders, but metaphorically called "the blacksmith," because he riveted the chains of matrimony, lived in the first house beyond the bridge which spanned the river Sark, and, with a ceremonial as unseemly as it was brief, married all comers, often with pursuers at his very doors; and the marriages so contracted were not to be set aside. For more than half a century Gretna Green weddings had figured largely in the literature of the stage and of the circulating library; and there is no doubt that the halo of romance

thrown around an elopement to Gretna blinded to the impropriety of the prenuptial flight many a foolish or headstrong girl whom the actual ceremony shocked and startled.

Augusta Ashton, with all her sentimental romance, all her petulant wilfulness, all her resentment at being exiled from home and her Adonis, yet loved her parents well, although her reverence and filial obedience had been gradually undermined by the plausible sophistry and impassioned eloquence of her ardent lover. But if she loved them much, she, unfortunately, loved Laurence more. He was, to do him justice, terribly in earnest; and in the inexperience of her seventeen years she could not be expected to sift and analyse that passionate earnestness for its many components. With her *all* was *love*, and *love* was *all*.

His proposition had, nevertheless, come upon her with a shock. She was not prepared to ignore the prudent teaching of her

mother, or to brave the indignation of her indulgent father, or to forfeit her own self-respect, and nothing could have moved her to consent but that appalling threat of suicide, and he knew her tender heart well when he made it

But neither that threat nor her promise could reconcile her to the rash step, and she lay in bed shuddering with her own fears, and strangely enough her first thought was—"What would Jabez say if he knew it?" Not her father, not her mother, but the Jabez whom she had rebuffed only a week before, yet of whose opinion she somehow stood more in awe than of all else besides.

What did Jabez think, seeing that he did know? Think? He scarcely could think. Feeling seemed to overpower thought, reason, perception. When after a stagnant time he emerged from the stair-head, it was more as a culprit than Jabez Clegg. He put down the bottles and escaped again into the open air, cowed alike by the knowledge

which had overpowered him, and by a sense of dishonour at having played the unworthy part of listener, albeit the listening had been involuntary, seeing that the shock of his discovery had stunned him like a blow from a sledge-hammer, crushing his own long-cherished hopes to death. His next thought was of intense thankfulness that by any means the schemes of Aspinall had been bared to him, and in time to attempt the rescue of his idolised Augusta from the clutches of a villain.

Unacquainted with the events which had preceded Augusta's removal to Carr—unaware that the Mosley Street doors had been closed against Laurence, or that a formal proposal for the young lady's hand had been made by the elder Aspinall on behalf of his son, and peremptorily declined by the Ashtons; ignorant that imperious Mr. Aspinall, in his gouty wrath, had sworn "upon his honour" that his son *should* "marry the girl in spite of the paltry

beggar's-inkle-weaver," and having no faith in the man himself, Jabez regarded the use of the father's name only as a proof of his greater perfidy, and gave him no credit even for an honourable intention or an honest emotion. The time was past for Clegg to find excuses for the wrong-doing of his adversary.

Now, with every nerve unstrung, he was required to act, and that promptly. To-morrow would be too late. What if he should take Miss Chadwick into his confidence? But no, he could not lower Augusta in the eyes even of her own cousin; and neither she nor anyone there had authority to detain Miss Ashton against her will even if her foot were on the step of the post-chaise. It was imperative that he should reach Manchester immediately, yet how to do so without exciting alarm perplexed him. There was a horse in the stable at the mill, but as he had a bed in Simon's room, and could neither leave it nor

return to it in the night without passing through the Hulmes' sleeping apartment, there was a difficulty in quitting the house unknown.

"I must be at the mill before daybreak to-morrow having something of importance to attend to, so I will sleep on the squab in the house-place, Mrs. Hulme, and if I am not in for breakfast, do not wait for me," said he; and no one questioned him, although Mrs. Hulme and her husband were of joint opinion that "Jabez looked terribly put eawt," and wondered what business he could have on hand of so much consequence.

No one thought of locking country cottage doors. By nine o'clock all the inmates were in bed and asleep. Before ten Jabez, sad at heart, had quietly left the cottage for the mill, had saddled Peveril, and, though no great horseman, was speeding past the "White Hart" along the highway to Manchester, fast as the steady-going roadster would travel. The wind had risen,

and the rain came down persistently; but heedless of discomfort or danger, with the one thought paramount in his mind—the preservation of his master's daughter—he set his teeth and rode on with a feverish impatience, which at length communicated itself to Peveril, and quickened the beat of the sensible animal's hoof; impatience which would have sent him flying over the toll-gates, had either he or his steed been equal to the exploit, and which could barely brook the delay of drowsy tollkeepers.

Nevertheless as he turned from Piccadilly into Mosley Street, the muffled-up old watchman, catching the echoes of the Infirmary clock, bawled out, to mark his own vigilance, "Just one o'clock, an' a dark rainy neet!" and the Ashton household had closed its eyelids, and its account with the day, at least a couple of hours.

It is never pleasant to be the bearer of ill-tidings, so no wonder Jabez hesitated with the lion-headed knocker in his hand,

ere he sent its reverberations growling through the silent house. His hesitation must have influenced the knocker, for the lion had to roar again, and louder, before he heard the window above unclose, and saw Mr. Ashton's night-capped head thrust out, to ask, in alarm,

"Who's there? What's the matter?"

Jabez stepped back to the kerbstone to let the dull rays of an oil lamp fall upon his face.

"It is I, Jabez Clegg, sir; I have a matter of importance to communicate."

"Good heavens, Clegg, you! Surely the mill's not been burned down?"

"No, sir, all's right at the factory. There's no harm done anywhere at *present*. If you will please to come down, I hope there may be time to prevent that which is threatened."

"Just so, I'll be down directly."

There were no lucifer-matches with which to procure instantaneous light, but during this brief colloquy, Mrs. Ashton had been

groping on the tall chimney-piece for their precursors the Prometheans, and having found them, by dipping a small chemically prepared match into a tiny bottle of fluid, she obtained a light as soon as the window was closed and the draught shut out.

Too uneasy to waste much time in dressing, before many minutes had flown, Mr. and Mrs. Ashton, whose fears had equally pointed to their daughter—the one in a roquelaure, and the other in her warehouse overall—were both listening with agitated and anxious faces to Mr. Clegg's communication, made with a discomposure great as their own.

"Elope!" both parents exclaimed, simultaneously.

"Elope!" reiterated the mother; "our daughter consent to elope, and with a reprobate like him? It is not possible!"

"So I should have said, madam, yesterday," rejoined Jabez sadly, as he sank on a chair, overpowered more by the strain on

his feelings than by the fatigue of his long, wet, midnight ride; "and I would have given the *world* to have been able to doubt the evidence of my own ears."

Mrs. Ashton, with clasped hands up, sat opposite to Jabez; Mr. Ashton, lacking the consolation and inspiration of his snuff-box, walked about the room with one hand to his head in a state of distressing perturbation. He stopped in his walk to ask, "What's to be done?" as Jabez made this declaration, unconscious of its force.

The light of the chamber candle fell upon the haggard face and drenched garments of the young man. The elder one looked full at him, paused, then drawing near and laying his right hand heavily on the other's wet shoulder, asked in a troubled voice, with an inquisitorial but not unkind manner—

"My lad, did no other motive than duty to your employers bring you eighteen miles through the rain this dark night, to save Miss Ashton from an imprudent marriage?"

Jabez had not stopped to analyse his own motives. Thus questioned, it was not without embarrassment that he answered—

"Mrs. Ashton desired me, sir, to watch over Miss Ashton, and acquaint you with any matter affecting her welfare. But apart from that, sir, I could not see Miss Ashton in the toils of a libertine without an attempt to rescue her. I should have been a dastard to sit passive; and even now I feel we are losing time."

"Just so, just so," assented Mr. Ashton. "That reminds me, Peveril is in the street, and you are soaked to the skin. My dear" —turning to his wife—"will you arouse the servants, and see that neither horse nor rider suffers in our service more than we can help."

Having thus got rid of his wife, of whom he stood somewhat in awe, he resumed his searching catechism of Jabez.

"And so, Clegg, you have no motive beyond a chivalrous desire to save your mas-

ter's daughter, no *interest* to serve beyond your duty to us?"

The ordeal was terrible. Jabez rose, his features working convulsively.

"Mr. Ashton, you are torturing me. Humble as I am, I love Miss Ashton with my whole life and soul. But knowing the distance between us, I have striven to keep the secret in my own breast. And I protest I had no double motive in my journey hither."

The genial small-ware manufacturer, to whom that night had brought two revelations, looked Jabez steadfastly in the face as he made his avowal; then, taking him kindly by the hand, said—his eyes swimming—

"Just so, just so, my lad! I believe you. And, Jabez Clegg, let me tell you that I would rather give my daughter to an upright persevering man like you, without a penny, than to a spendthrift like Laurence Aspinall, though he rolled in riches. But it's no use saying that *now*."

Indeed there was no use, and time was flying. A glance of grateful attachment, and a mute pressure of his liberal master's hand, were the sole acknowledgment of Jabez. But a new bond was established between the twain.

Mrs. Ashton had come back to discuss with her husband and Jabez the best mode of procedure. She was not less shrewd than her lord, and had not failed to perceive that the young man's heart was in the service he now rendered them. The blow dealt by Augusta to her pride dashed down the impalpable barrier between them, and she took counsel with him as a tried and true friend.

Mr. Clegg pointed out the necessity for his return to the mill before it should open, and he be missed ; and taking a proffered glass of brandy and water to avert cold, he hurried, whilst hot coffee was preparing, to change his soaked garments preparatory to the ride back; his elders also taking the

opportunity to dress and prepare for departure with the morning coach.

Not a moment was wasted, but though Peveril had been well groomed and fed, he was not as fresh to the road as he had been ; still the journey was homeward, the rain had abated ; day began to dawn as he left Stockport behind, and without much use of the whip, Jabez had his horse back in the stable before the factory bell began to ring. And then the *beast* was allowed to rest. The jaded *man* had to rouse himself to another day's work, another day's trial and excitement, without a moment for repose.

To everybody's astonishment, Mr. and Mrs. Ashton stepped out of the "Lord Nelson" coach, that morning, at the bottom of the avenue, with a carpet-bag for luggage. The difference of their reception by daughter and niece was palpable, and they could not fail to observe how much the former was disconcerted by their arrival.

"Oh, aunt and uncle, this is a pleasant

surprise!" exclaimed Ellen, running down the avenue to meet them.

"*You* do not appear very well pleased to see us, Augusta," remarked Mrs. Ashton, as they met her lazily sauntering through the garden towards them, as captivating in her printed morning dress as a sleepless night, an anxious headache, and her unmistakable confusion would permit the recognised beauty to be.

"Oh, yes, I am pleased enough, but I should have been better pleased if you had written instead of coming upon one so suddenly. It is quite startling!" and the petulance of her tone gave effect to the pettish frown on her brow.

"My dear, 'ill thoughts make ill looks,'" said Mrs. Ashton gravely, with a searching glance. "What is the matter with you this morning? Nothing serious, I hope."

The very inquiry apparently annoyed her.

"Oh, I've got a headache, that's all. I

heard a man's foot on the gravel-walk long after everyone was in bed, and I got a fright."

"I think it was only Crazy Joe—he hangs about at all hours," put in Ellen, who had not heard the crunch of Mr. Clegg's heel on the gravel, as he stood for a moment under their window, to breathe a prayer for the safety and well-being of the supposed sleeper, before he turned away swiftly on his errand.

Almost Mr. Ashton's first inquiry was for Mr. Clegg.

"He's at the mill, sir. He was off afore any on us was up; an' he said happen he mightna git whome fur breakfast, he wur so busy," was the reply of Bess.

But Mr. Ashton, setting off towards the factory, encountered Jabez on the way, and they returned together to breakfast, as if they had met for the first time that morning. On Mrs. Ashton's suggestion, Augusta was neither questioned nor accused.

"We should only tempt her to deny, and perhaps provoke ill-will towards our informant, with no good end," she said. "Better wait and ascertain beyond question what her intentions are."

Jabez would fain have spared her the pain and shame of exposure, but the matter was out of his hands.

The day passed unmarked save by Augusta's restless look-out for Crazy Joe, and the way she hung about her mother, as if half afraid of the rash step she contemplated.

Mr. Ashton meanwhile, to cover his distress and agitation, busied himself about the transfer of the White Hart (which he pronounced "admirable") to its place over the inn-door, and managed to elicit from Chapman, the gossiping landlord, without direct inquiry, that a fine young spark in hunting gear had put up his horse there several times within the past week, and was like to make the fortune of Crazy Joe, he

gave the poor softy so many half-crowns; but Joe was "deep, and never let on what he got them for."

CHAPTER VI.

DEFEATED.

JABEZ CLEGG and the young ladies occupied adjoining chambers (the two inner rooms of the suite), but the door of communication was locked, and they were attained by different staircases. Thus, as he was compelled to pass through the Hulmes' sleeping-apartment, so Ellen and Augusta were constrained to go backwards and forwards through that of Mr. and Mrs. Ashton—an arrangement to which long use had probably reconciled them.

It was this fact which had so much disconcerted Augusta, since she foresaw a difficulty in escaping unheard; and not

meeting with Joe (that most unpromising of Cupids), she was as equally unable to convey a message to her expectant lover. She repented her rash promise, and would fain have availed herself of a pretext for delay; but the night came, and, haunted by imaginery pictures of Laurence with a pistol to his head, she dared not disappoint him. She had promised to meet him at that entrance of the Lovers' Walk which opened below Yeardsley-Hall Farm into Moor Lane, whilst, the lane being a steep declivity, he was to keep the post-chaise in waiting at the foot.

Her headache served as an excuse for retiring to bed earlier than her cousin, and scarcely could her father and mother restrain themselves as she kissed them lingeringly before she went. Indeed, Mr. Ashton would much have preferred to "have it out with the girl at once, and have done with it," there not being much "waiting" blood in his veins.

He had kept out of her sight most of the day, fidgeting over one thing and another, whilst his waistcoat and shirt-frill bore testimony to the constant raid on his snuff-box.

"I don't like to see my poor lass trapped like a bird in a cage," he said, in confidence, to Jabez, whose opinion he already knew agreed with his own, as did the desire to "thrash the infernal scoundrel within an inch of his life."

The last straw had broken the camel's back, and Jabez was no longer inclined to be passive.

Laurence had bid Augusta take no care for her wardrobe; his purse was ample, and he would dress her like a queen if she would only consent to fly with him. So, after collecting a few immediate necessaries and trinkets, and placing the reticule which contained them out of sight, she crept into bed, to lie and listen for the household to follow her example. How lazily the hours

lagged! She heard old Simon shuffling about, and the creaking of his camp-bedstead, as he settled his old rheumatic bones for the night, but the firm foot of Jabez she did not hear, though the house clock struck nine, and Ellen came up with the last stroke.

In answer to a question, Ellen said that Mr. Clegg was asleep on the squab, and that she understood he had slept there the previous night, to be able to go to the mill very early, without disturbing anyone else.

"I saw him as he lay there, where he had fallen asleep shortly after tea, and I have been speaking to my uncle about him; he looks so dreadfully worn and jaded, I am sure he is either killing himself with overwork, or has some great trouble on his mind," and a deep sigh followed this expression of opinion.

Augusta was silent. Something within her secret heart whispered that the trouble of Jabez Clegg would be intensified sevenfold by her act of that night; and,

haughty as she was betimes, she pitied him. And whatever were her compunctions, fears, or emotions, Jabez certainly shared with her parents in her thoughts.

Ellen slept. The clock struck ten. Father and mother entered their room, and through the door which Augusta had artfully requested Ellen to "leave open on account of the heat" came the sound of their voices in low but earnest converse—"You leave her to me, William," spoken with decision, being the only words she could distinguish, though she heard her father walk about for some time. Indeed, she thought he would never go to bed.

Eleven! She slipped stealthily from the side of her sleeping cousin, and by the light of the moon, clear enough to-night, dressed as noiselessly and rapidly as her trepidation would permit. From habit she knelt to pray, but as she came to the passage, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," a new meaning seemed to flash

through the words, and she half wavered in her purpose.

"Poor Jabez!" she murmured to herself, as she caught up her shoes and reticule, and listened in the open doorway for the deep breathing which came from behind the dimity curtains of the four-post bed. Re-assured, she stepped lightly across the room in her stocking-feet, turned the drop-handle of that chamber door as silently as the squeaking latch would permit, and fled swiftly down the stairs, sitting down at the bottom to put on her shoes.

She had raised the sash, and was in the very act of stepping over the low window-sill, when a foot was heard on the stair, and turning her head, she saw her mother fully dressed close by her side, and felt her slight wrist grasped as in a vice.

"Is this your filial love and obedience, misguided girl? Is this the result of Madame Broadbent's training? Have you no more sense of honour and decency than

to elope at midnight with any man, least of all with the worthless reprobate who has caught your silly fancy? Could you not think that chastity is the brightest jewel in a woman's crown, and the soonest dimmed, that you were ready to leave your character at the mercy of every gossip who had a tongue to wag?"

She had drawn Augusta, too much stunned to speak, into the parlour close at hand, and had shut the doors—a needless precaution, seeing how remote were all sleepers. A few words of gentle motherly inquiry might have softened impulsive, tender-hearted Augusta to tears, and turned the whole current of her life; but Mrs. Ashton's stateliness had become sternness, and, fresh from the evil teaching of Laurence Aspinall, her daughter's proud spirit rose in rebellion, and answered her.

"We are going to be married. And I was not going with Laurence alone. Cicily

was to travel with us. Laurence himself proposed it."

"Infatuated girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, "Cicily was in Mosley Street last night."

"And so were you, mother," was the smart retort, "but the coach which dropped you here carried her to Buxton. Outside passengers were muffled up, but she waved her handkerchief as she passed, as a sign to me."

"Sign to you, indeed! I marvel you are not ashamed of yourself and your hero, who is not content with corrupting my daughter, but must corrupt our servants also! A fine hero indeed, whose qualifications are all external! I cannot see what there is to admire in him."

"Not see what there is to admire in that exquisite figure and beautiful face! Why, I shall be the envy of half the girls in Manchester when I marry him!" Augusta

exclaimed, with anything but the air of a culprit just detected.

"But you are not likely to marry him, you forward chit. You go back to Manchester to-morrow, and I will take good care you don't marry either clandestinely or openly a man so sure to make your heart ache, if he were thrice as handsome."

"But I WILL marry him, mamma—*I'll please my eye, if I plague my heart!*"

"*Then, as you make your bed, so must you lie, miss,*" answered Mrs. Ashton, gravely and deliberately. "But take my word for it, neither your papa nor myself will give our consent. And now go to your room, Augusta, and thank God you have been saved from disgrace this night, and thank us that we have kept you from open exposure. Not even your cousin has a notion of this last folly. Our daughter's honour is dearer to us than to herself," and the mother's tone softened as she spoke.

"Your daughter's honour has never been

in any danger," said Augusta haughtily, as she swept from the room, to encounter at the foot of the stairs, flooded by moonlight through the open window, her father—and Jabez.

Up to that moment she had stood on the defensive, her wayward spirit upholding and arming her for retort. The sight of the father who had indulged her every whim, and of Jabez whose esteem she valued more than she herself knew, gave a sudden shock to her overwrought nerves, and she fell forward into the arms of Jabez in a deep swoon.

Tenderly, respectfully, sadly, he bore her into the parlour, and, placing her on the sofa, relinquished her to her mother, divesting himself of his shoes in order to procure water to restore her without creating alarm.

When she recovered he was gone; she was alone with the parents whose counsels she had despised, whose love she had wounded; herself detected and humiliated.

A greater humiliation had fallen to the lot of elate, enamoured, and self-satisfied Laurence Aspinall, when, leaving his friend Barret with the post-chaise, their saddle-horses, and Cicily at the bottom of Moor Lane, he mounted the hill and whistled softly at the entrance of the Lovers' Walk, to call forth—not a blushing maiden, half afraid of her own temerity, but—two justly incensed and indignant men. His low-voiced "Augusta" died upon his lips; he recoiled, stammered—

"You! I—I did not expect—— D—nation! What brought you here? I thought——"

"Just so, you atrocious scoundrel, you thought God had left our pet lamb to the fangs of the wolf, and that neither father nor friend was near to protect the innocent!" exclaimed Mr. Ashton, raising the stout bamboo with which he was provided.

"If that infernal Cicily has betrayed us, I'll——"

The threat was not completed, for Jabez interrupted him with—

"No, sir, it was not Cicily. You betrayed yourself. You laid bare your whole scheme in this walk within my hearing, Mr. Laurence Aspinall, and the sophistry which misled a simple confiding girl could not delude one who knew you as I do."

"D—nation!" hissed Laurence between his teeth. "You infernal charity-school whelp! Am I to meet you at every turn? I suppose you want Miss Ashton for yourself, but I'll balk you yet!" and, but that Jabez had a quick eye and hand, his riding-whip would have seamed the latter's manly face.

Jabez dexterously caught the light whip, and wrenched it from him, a simultaneous sharp blow of Mr. Ashton's bamboo on Aspinall's shoulders tending to loosen his grasp. And then the two young men, with all the fever of jealousy added to old animosity, closed and grappled with each

other as might a lion and a tiger in the arena. And Mr. Ashton, his love of fair play yielding to his exasperation, made good use of his bamboo whenever he could deal a blow without harming Jabez.

The two combatants were not unequally matched; there was little difference in size and weight, but the scientific skill of Laurence had more than a counterpoise in the nerve and muscle of Jabez, strengthened by exercise and a temperate life, whilst vicious courses had somewhat impaired his own athletic frame.

The struggle on the steep hill-side was too deadly for noise. At length Laurence —himself booted and spurred—in striving to take an unfair advantage and rip the unprotected calves of Jabez with the rowels of his spurs, lost his foothold, and was borne to the earth, falling heavily. He lay on the ground stunned and motionless. At once Jabez, with a swift revulsion of feeling, knelt down by the side of his prostrate foe,

and raised his head; Mr. Ashton bending over them inquiringly, just as Barret, whom curiosity and impatience had drawn from his post below, came on the scene. A stifled groan, and a muttered curse, having assured Clegg that his rival was not mortally injured, he called to Barret—

"Here, sir, take charge of your worthy principal; and be careful, when next you plan an elopement, that you have not a man to deal with instead of a credulous girl."

Mr. Ashton's "Just so!" coming sharply in as chorus, the young man put his arm in that of the elder and drew him away, leaving Barret and the postilion to restore Laurence Aspinall, and assist him into the post-chaise by the side of Cicily—whose trepidation would have been very much increased could she have seen how the blood was trickling down from a wound in his head, staining still more the torn, miry

coat, and the disordered shirt-frill over which he was usually so fastidious.

Barret, leading his companion's horse, rode on in advance of the vehicle, to prepare the pompous gentleman, laid up with the gout in Buxton Crescent, for the reception of his gentlemanly son in a highly gentlemanlike condition—hatless, wigless, dirty, dilapidated, bruised, bloody—and unsuccessful. The hat had rolled down-hill, to be crushed under the wheels of the chaise; the wig and broken whip were found the next morning by Crazy Joe, who exercised his witless head respecting them and the trampled ground to small purpose; then brought them to his friend Sim as playthings. Had they fallen into the hands of a reasoning mortal, much more perplexity, and a very serious mystery, might have been the result.

Buxton being only five miles from Whaley-Bridge, Barret again made his appearance in the neighbourhood of the "White Hart," whilst the new sign still

attracted rustic admirers; and, finding no rumours current respecting the occurrence of the preceding night, he rode off again, having first committed to Crazy Joe a scarcely decipherable missive from the discomfited lover to the not less disconsolate damsel.

The evening coach bore the Ashtons and Ellen back to Manchester; Augusta still in a rebellious mood, the cause of which, being hidden from her cousin, occasioned the latter no little perplexity. There was something, too, in the manner of her uncle and aunt to Jabez, and of Jabez to all, which, being undefinable and impalpable, struck her as peculiar. He seemed suddenly to have risen to another footing. How was it they had taken him into their confidence?

Not until the last moment—when attention was distracted by the bustle at the inn-door, the disposal of the luggage, and the taking of seats—could Crazy Joe (with cunning worthy a better cause) contrive to

slip the billet-doux into Miss Ashton's reticule, unseen by all but herself.

Not until she reached her own room could she scan its characteristic contents, which ran as follows :—

"Crescent, Buxton,
"September ——, 1821.

"Adored Augusta,

"Excuse this scrawl; I can scarcely hold my pen in consequence of a ruffianly attack made upon me by your father's favourite factotum, Jabez Clegg, in Moor Lane last night. Can you disclose to me the strange fatality which kept you from my expectant arms, and revealed our plans to that upstart foundling? Had not Mr. Ashton also struck at me with a thick stick, I could readily have disposed of his assistant; but my foot tripped over a stone, and falling, I lay at their mercy. Yet, sweet Augusta, if my blood flowed it was for thy sake, and for thy sake I endure.

"Be constant, be firm; let no tyranny

coerce you, and I will make a way for our union, if I steal you from their very midst. I have a dislocated ankle, a bruised and swollen hand, a plaistered crown, and I write painfully. I shall feel every hour a year until I hold you in my arms again. But if my angelic Augusta be only true to her promise, she will soon, in spite of spies and informers, be the adored wife of her

"Most devoted

"LAURENCE."

CHAPTER VII.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON.

IT is no uncommon thing for a woman to gild a block, wreathe it with flowers, and then fall down and worship the idol she has adorned. Augusta's hero needed no outward embellishment, so she fitted the fair exterior with the perfections and virtues of the high-spirited, noble, generous Mortimers and Mowbrays whose acquaintance she had made in print, and had set him on a very elevated pedestal, in spite of all warnings. With that misleading letter of his before her, no wonder if the "blood shed for her sweet sake" converted the hero into the martyr, and placed Jabez and

her father in the category of cruel persecutors. It did more. It erected a barrier against reconciliation. In vain her placable father held out a flag of truce; she kept aloof resentfully, though in the solitude of her own chamber she gave way, and wept at her isolation from all who loved her.

Mrs. Ashton, whose sense of propriety had been outraged, whose maternal pride had received a terrible shock, was less readily disposed to condone her daughter's offence; and, being a better business woman than a psychologist, her tactics showed none of her ordinary shrewdness.

The failure of Augusta's banishment to Carr should have taught her that romance is nursed in solitude, and that conciliation is better than coercion. Had she spared a few hours from the warehouse to arrange a dance, or a gipsy-party to Dunham Park; chaperoned her lovely daughter to assembly, theatre, or concert-room; invited her companionship in a stroll through St. Ann's

Square and King Street, calling at Mrs. Edge's fashionably-frequented library by the way; joined the after-morning-church promenaders in the Infirmary gardens, or given a little time to morning calls, she would have brought Augusta into contact with young people of her own age, and with the attractive of the opposite sex, and so have supplied an antidote for the poison Laurence and ultra-sentimental literature had instilled.

Instead, never was the golden fruit of the Hesperides more vigilantly guarded. She was kept much within doors. The modern notion that a daily airing is indispensable had not been promulgated, or had not become the creed of the manufacturing community. Mrs. Ashton had "no leisure for gadding," and Augusta cared little to drive in the gig with only James for her charioteer, or even to walk with Ellen, so long as the mulberry-coloured livery was in attendance. (It might have been otherwise,

had not the said James held it as much "beneath his dignity" to accept a bribe as he had formerly done to wait upon Mr. Clegg.) From her old bed-room, which overlooked Mosley Street, she was relegated to one in the rear which commanded no wider prospect than their own courtyard, nor anything more interesting than Nelson and his kennel—by-the-by, Nelson had been in favour since the sad accident on the ice. Then, visits to Marsden Square were prohibited lest she should there meet John Walmsley's undesirable friend; and altogether her escapade had converted home into a cage, in spite of its gilding.

As might have been expected, the high-spirited, wayward girl, so long her father's pet, so long indulged in her caprices, chafed and rebelled against every fresh token of restraint, and contrasted the dull monotony of her life with the freedom and gaiety promised so frequently by Laurence as the certain concomitants of wifehood with him.

With all her haughty spirit, she had a clinging, affectionate nature, tinged though it was with poetry and romance; and now that her father looked so unusually grave, and her mother so frigid, and she felt herself an alien from both their hearts, instead of bewailing her premeditated flight as a crime, the tendrils of her love only clung closer to him who professed so much, and the more she was isolated from them, the more she brooded on the ill-used and maligned Laurence, his manly beauty and accomplishments, his lavish generosity, his fascinations of voice and manner, and the fervour of his passion for her.

Meanwhile, Tom Hulme had resumed his duties at Whaley-Bridge Mill, and Jabez returned home to his. Much to Augusta's surprise, he was not only invited to dine with them on the day of his return, but to take his place henceforth at their board as one of the family.

With Laurence's misrepresentations fixed

in her mind as truths, she construed the daily association thus thrust upon her as a deliberate affront, and resented it with a silent scorn which cut Jabez to the soul. He knew nothing of Aspinall's letter, or that he was accused of a "ruffianly attack;" he only felt that he would have died to serve her, and had done what he had to save her from life-long misery without a single thought of keeping her for himself.

A few more days, and back to Manchester came Mr. Aspinall senior, having left a little of his portliness with his gout in the Buxton Baths. Back with him came his son, and his son's congenial companion, Mr. Edmund Barret; the former still smarting under his defeat at Carr, and all the more resolutely determined to carry off Augusta, jealousy adding a new element to his love, a new aliment to his hate.

Sitting idly by the parlour window on the third of October, with her head leaning against the frame, meditating on her own

unhappiness and her parents' harshness, Augusta suddenly started to her feet with a suppressed cry of delight, a vivid glow upon her cheeks, a brilliant sparkle in her eye. Laurence Aspinall, mounted on Black Ralph, his favourite hunter, was riding up the street, the dislocated ankle apparently not affecting his enjoyment of equestrian exercise. As he raised his new beaver in graceful salutation, even the flutter into which she was thrown could not prevent her missing his glorious curls. He had not deemed it necessary to replace his wig, and the poll shorn during fever had not yet grown a fresh crop ripe for harvest. The unfavourable impression passed with the moment, as he brought his obedient steed on the flagged pavement close under the window, and without a moment's hesitation she raised the sash, and leaned forward to speak with him, glad of the opportunity.

"Oh, Laurence!"

"My own Augusta, this is indeed fortunate!"

Their hands clasped upon the window-sill, —the elevation of the house raising her to his level—her tearful eyes looked up in his for traces of suffering after the "ruffianly attack," and found there, mingled with the fierce light of violent love, a bitter sense of defeat, a resolve to obtain her by fair means or foul.

Each had the separate experience of that memorable September night to relate, coloured as passion or prejudice prevailed; but neither could fully enlighten the other as to the share Mr. Clegg had had in preventing the elopement.

He could tell her that Jabez had avowed overhearing their conversation in the Lovers' Walk, though where he could have been to overhear, or what strange fatality could bring Mr. and Mrs. Ashton to Carr in time to become the recipients of his eavesdropping and defeat their plans, was a puzzle to both.

Be sure Laurence put the worst colour on the encounter in the lane, and urged all he had himself endured to strengthen his claims upon her—claims she was quite willing to admit, had she the power to concede to them.

Having shown with very evident annoyance how impossible it was for her to meet or give him a private interview, he exclaimed with indignation—

"What! not allowed to visit a relative, or to go abroad without a gaoler! My dearest Augusta, this is a cruel state of captivity. But my bird must not be allowed to fray her beautiful plumage in beating against the bars of her cage. I must devise a better plan for her escape. Any means are justifiable to obtain release from tyranny like this. What says my love? Is she still willing to trust her Laurence?"

"To the death!" she whispered emphatically.

"You are alone here every morning!"

Her lips could barely frame a "Yes," when a voice and step in the hall warned her to close the window with a hurried gesture to him; and before Mrs. Ashton, who had lingered to give an order to James, could enter the room, Black Ralph was cantering towards the Portico, and Augusta occupied with the third volume of "Alinda, or the Child of Mystery."

Very little escaped Mrs. Ashton's eye. The clatter of hoofs on the flags, audible through the thick front door, had left no sensible impression on her brain, but the heightened colour of Augusta attracted her attention at once. She brought her work-basket from the panel-cupboard, took thence a strip of cambric muslin, and handed it to her daughter.

"My dear," said she quietly, "'all play makes no hay.' Your eyes are younger than mine, and I think it will do you more good to hem your father's shirt-frills than to pore over sentimental books from morning until

night. So much romance-reading is not good for you. I see that you are quite flushed and excited over the one you are perusing now."

There was a sharp rat-tat on the lion's head, and in burst Mr. Ashton, much more flushed and excited than his daughter. He had met Mr. Laurence on Black Ralph just as he was quitting the Portico, after an angry discussion with Mr. Aspinall the elder.

"You are quite right, my dear, in saying, 'Like father, like son,'" cried he, "for I'll swallow my snuff-box if that pompous old cotton-merchant did not justify his scapegrace son in his attempt to carry off our Augusta! He said that 'the end justified the means,' that we 'ought to be proud of such an alliance'"—Mrs. Ashton's lip curled —"that 'he was glad Miss Ashton had more discernment than her parent,' that 'his boy had set his heart upon her, and should not be thwarted in his choice by any beggar's-

inkle-weaver in England.' And no sooner had I left him in the reading-room, to digest *my* opinion on the subject, and put my foot on the steps of the Portico, than up rode young Hopeful, and took off his hat to me, bowing down to his black horse's mane."

Having delivered himself of this explosive intelligence, Mr. Ashton walked about, and sought a sedative in his snuff-box; and Augusta, who, folding the hem of the frill, had not lost one word, said, drily,

"I think Mr. Aspinall's justification of his son's design may at least be taken as a vindication of Mr. Laurence's *honourable* intentions, of which so many doubts have been expressed. And the bow equally absolves Laurence from a charge of malice."

With a proud toss of her shapely head, she walked towards the dining-room, rejecting the proffered arm of Jabez, who had entered the parlour whilst Mr. Ashton was speaking, and thus closed a discussion which

could not be continued in the presence of servants.

Jabez, on his return from Carr, had found his rough old clerical friend confined to his room seriously ill. Tabitha was worn out with his humours and eccentricities, and was glad when the young man offered to relieve her twice or thrice a week; and old Joshua welcomed him as a relief from the monotonous garrulity of an unlettered old woman. Jabez could bring him news of another stamp. Through Ben Travis (who had discovered that activity was the best antidote to melancholy), he kept him informed of the progress of the incipient temperance movement, in which the Parson took uncommon interest; through Mr. Ashton, he kept him *au courant* of town politics, and for general intelligence he brought newspapers with him to read interrupted by many and unique commentaries. In order that Tabitha might obtain repose, Mr. Clegg usually remained

until a late hour, Mrs. Ashton herself entrusting him with a latch-key on these occasions.

One night, towards the middle of October, when Joshua had been more than ordinarily crusty, and Jabez did not quit the classic corner until the "wee short hour ayont the twal," he was struck as he turned the corner from Market Street into Mosley Street to find Mr. Aspinall's carriage in waiting with four horses and postilions.

He stood still for a moment to reassure himself, but carriages were not so common that he should mistake that one; and his heart drummed an alarm within his breast.

Hurrying on with sad misgivings, he passed two tall figures muffled in cloaks, whom he had no difficulty in recognizing, from build and walk, to be the Aspinalls, father and son; and increasing his speed he gained the door, inserted his key in the latch, and was on the stairs before the cloaked individuals had finished their speculations respecting his

being a robber escaped from a constable.

Formerly, Augusta had to pass his room door to reach her own, on the opposite side of the long corridor. Her new chamber was next to his own, and nearer to the staircase. A thin stream of light shot through the key-hole, and a bright narrow line cast upon the opposite wall showed the door ajar. He stood still in his surprise.

As if a tipsy, musically-disposed man were going past, the refrain of a rollicking song was trolled out in the street; and then Augusta, equipped as for a journey, came forth from her chamber to descend the stairs. She had calculated on the signal an hour earlier, and expected Jabez an hour later. As she stole on tiptoe down the stairs Jabez confronted her and barred her progress. Her silver candlestick dropped from her hand, with the one word "Again!" and rolling down with a clang, awakened Mr. and Mrs. Ashton, the only

sleepers on that floor, and set Nelson barking furiously. They were in the dark, but he had caught her hand.

"Miss Ashton, this is infatuation—madness."

"No matter, sir, let me pass, you have no right to detain me."

"But I have, miss," said her father coming behind, guided by their voices, his scant apparel as invisible in the gloom as himself. "Is this another attempt to disgrace us by eloping? Oh, my child, my child, you are breaking your poor old father's heart!"

"And mine!" floated like the echo of despair's last sigh from the lips of Jabez.

But the utter hopelessness of the old man's tone touched a sensitive chord of Augusta's soul, and turning, she fell upon his neck crying tearfully, "Oh! forgive me, father, forgive me. I did not think you would take it so much to heart."

The appeal of affection to affection had accomplished what reason and authority had failed to effect.

CHAPTER VIII.

WITH ALL HIS FAULTS.

AUGUSTA'S penitence exhaled like dew from a flower. In the light of her mother's lofty displeasure her tears dried, and self-will once more exerted its pre-eminence. She locked herself in her own room and resolutely refused to come forth.

"So long as that odious meddler Jabez Clegg remains under our roof, I will stay here; and, if you will not consent to my marriage with Laurence Aspinall, I will starve myself to death!" was her angry declaration, as she closed the door and turned the key.

"Leave her alone," said Mrs. Ashton, "she will want her food before the food

wants her; and a little wholesome solitude is good for reflection. She will change her mind before the day closes."

This was at mid-day; but night came, and another noon, yet there was no sign of Miss Ashton's appearance; and Mrs. Ashton had made no overtures to her refractory daughter. The tender-hearted father was in a pitiable state of perturbation. In and out the warehouse he was twenty times in the day—as Kezia observed, "For a' th' world like a hen on a hot griddle;" and his snuff-box was hardly ever out of his hand. Business seemed altogether beyond his grasp; he answered questions at random, or was unconscious when addressed.

To this state of trouble Jabez unintentionally contributed his quota. Over the tea-table, unenlivened by Augusta's sparkling presence, though she was the one sole topic of conversation—he said, and not without an effort—

"It has occurred to me, and I have thought the matter well over, that since my unfortunate position in relation to late events has made my very presence obnoxious to Miss Ashton, it might be better for all concerned if I were to shift my quarters without delay. There are lodgings vacant close at hand; and I have no right to linger here and disturb the peace of any one member of your kind family."

"Jabez Clegg!" remonstrated Mr. Ashton, with wide-open eyes.

"Have you any *other* reason to be dissatisfied with present arrangements?" asked Mrs. Ashton stiffly.

"Oh! Mrs. Ashton, how can I have? This house has been my home for years, and such a home as rarely falls to the lot of the fatherless. To you, my benefactors, I owe everything—almost myself; and I should ill repay your uniform kindness by remaining to create discord."

"If your only desire to remove is to

gratify Miss Ashton's whims, you will oblige me, Mr. Clegg, by remaining," replied Mrs. Ashton, with grave decision; whilst Mr. Ashton, looking the very picture of consternation, laid his hand upon the young man's sleeve, and said slowly—

"My lad, you have been one of the household for many years; do not be the first to make a breach in the family. If the child of our blood and our affections goes forth to strangers wilfully, and repudiates us, do not let the son of our adoption leave us to lament her loss in solitude."

This was strong language, but Mrs. Ashton did not gainsay it, and Mr. Clegg could not longer press the point, though his own pain was intensified by the fear of adding to the distress of Augusta, who, he was confident, regarded him as an interloper and a mischief-maker.

Little had been seen of Ellen since the return from Carr Cottage. A message

despatched by Mrs. Ashton to her sister, in her dilemma, was answered by another to pray them to "excuse Miss Chadwick, who was not well enough to go out."

This somewhat disconcerted Mrs. Ashton, who, more alarmed than she would admit, and disturbed by the restless uneasiness of her husband, had looked for Ellen to act as a mediator without any compromise of her own dignity.

At the close of the second day, as Augusta pertinaciously refused to open her door, at the instance of Jabez the lock was forced; and even then a barrier of chairs and boxes had to be thrust back by sheer strength. She was exhausted from want of food, but her will was indomitable, and neither her father's entreaties nor her mother's commands could induce her to partake of the viands spread before her.

Jabez was in agony. Delicacy and her obvious dislike had kept him from intruding upon her privacy, but as hour

after hour was added to the night, and Augusta persistently dashed aside the food placed to her lips, he joined his prayers to those of her father; and neither availing, rushed out of the house, and in less than a quarter of an hour returned with Dr. Hull. *He* was not a man to stand any nonsense.

"Here, sir"—to Jabez—"you are young and strong, hold the silly child's arms whilst her teeth are forced apart. If she will not take food, she shall take physic, and see which she likes the best."

But the struggle to nourish her frame through set teeth was prolonged and painful, and the parents were likely to yield before the child.

Servants may be faithful, but they have eyes and ears, and not always discreet tongues. Family matters discussed freely in the kitchen before apprentices, found their way into the warehouse and beyond it, and Mrs. Ashton's nerves tingled when she

became acquainted with the rumours afloat.

From Tim, the Ashton stable-boy, Aspinall's emissary (Bob the groom, once more in his old service) had no difficulty in obtaining all the information his young master needed.

Laurence waylaid Mr. Ashton, inquired anxiously after the obstinate girl's health, and, having paved the way by as much contrition as he thought necessary, called at the house the following morning, in company with his father, to renew proposals for Miss Ashton's hand.

Worn out by Augusta's obstinacy, which she and Laurence agreed to call "constancy," father and mother were in a different frame of mind to receive this proposition than when they had given their former peremptory rejection. They were not one whit more convinced by Mr. Laurence's assurance that he meant to "reform," or Mr. Aspinall's quotation of the adage, "A reformed rake makes the best husband";

but rather than see their child starve herself to death before their very eyes, they yielded; and Laurence Aspinall, profuse alike in thanks and professions, was permitted by aching hearts and reluctant lips to introduce Augusta to his father then and there as his bride elect.

It was a moment of triumph for Laurence when Augusta refused to come down without an assurance under his own hand. He pencilled on a card, "My Augusta, I wait for you,—Laurence." And presently, supported by a maid-servant, she entered the room, her dress of purple poplin serving to show how wan and transparent her fair skin had grown, how unnatural was the brilliance of her eyes.

She would have fallen, as much from weakness as emotion, on her entrance into the parlour, but that Laurence darted forward and caught her in an embrace which brought back somewhat of her lost colour; and if anything could have softened

the pain of that hour to her parents, it was the apparent ardour and sincerity of the lover, the hope that a genuine passion might tend to wean him from his old habits and associates.

Mr. Aspinall's reception of Augusta was characteristic.

"My charming Miss Ashton, I see my son has brought back the roses to your cheeks. May they never fade again, but bloom perennially without a thorn! I rejoice to kiss your hand paternally on this auspicious occasion, and to assure you that I shall be proud to welcome such beauty and such constancy as the wife of my noble son."

Consent once obtained, the Aspinalls were as eager to press forward the marriage as the Ashtons were to retard it, neither her father nor mother affecting a satisfaction they did not feel.

"My dear," said the latter to Augusta one day, when her eyes were sparkling

over a costly present just received from Laurence, "your father was in hopes you would have fixed your heart on some good steady man like Jabez Clegg, who would have been a comfort and a credit to all of us, and have kept the business in the family after we were in our graves."

"Pshaw, mamma! how preposterous! I am surprised at my father's infatuation for that young man. I esteem him quite sufficiently for a friend, but"—and she locked an emerald ear-ring in her delicate ear—"I could not exist with a husband whose heart was in his business. My husband's heart must hold me, and me only; and I must have something to look at as well as to love."

"Ah! Augusta, it must be a very small heart indeed which cannot find room both for a wife and a business to maintain her fittingly. The sheen of a dress which must last a life is of less consequence than its durable texture."

"Well, mamma, so long as the material pleases my eyes, I will take the wear upon trust. And do not be surprised that *your* daughter prefers a fine man and a gentleman to one whose fortune is in the clouds, and whose origin is so obscure, he has not *even a name* to call his own."

She was standing to admire herself and her new jewelry in the Venetian glass between the windows as she said this, and her mother's figure filling in the frame, Jabez Clegg came and went unseen, a pang in his heart and an intensified resolve to make both fortune and name for himself, even though his master's daughter vanished from his vision.

Nothing would induce Mr. Ashton to part with his child until she was at least eighteen; and in that particular he was proof against the importunities of Laurence and the cajoleries of Augusta. So for ten months (during which the lawyers had ample time to quarrel over the settlement

of Augusta's £18,000, so that too much or too little should not be tied down on the lady) the dashing young blade was on his trial, so to speak, and contrived to beguile both father and mother of their prejudices; whilst to Augusta a new world of gaiety was opened out.

As her daughter's chaperon, Mrs. Ashton renewed her acquaintance with the yellow satin cushions of the Assembly Rooms, the Gentlemen's Concerts discoursed sweet music in their ears, Miss Ashton could take her seat in the boxes of the Theatre Royal without fear of Madame Broadbent's fan, and Kezia was in her glory, so many balls and parties had to be catered for; and Mr. Laurence Aspinall was in the ascendant.

All this was inexpressibly painful to Jabez, but as he had written to Ben Travis that "there was something more for men to do than die of disappointments or blighted love," so he set his face like a

rock against the breakers, and gave himself entirely to business. He said to himself it would be cowardice to flee from that which must be borne and mastered, so never another word was heard of his seeking a home elsewhere. If he was brave, he was not foolhardy enough to court pain in the sight of his rival's triumph, and though in his determination to "stick to his last," he had eschewed all art which came not within the scope of pattern-designing, to that he turned with redoubled assiduity after business hours, having found a profitable market apart from Mr. Ashton's firm, as his account with the Savings Bank in Cross Street had borne witness from the date of its establishment in January, 1818.

But for a brief space, and that whilst the wound was raw and new, his ministrations to the dying chaplain of the Old Church not only carried him out of sight and hearing, but in a measure drew his thoughts away from his own sorrow.

Once only did Joshua scarify the sore. In an interval of pain he said with his customary abruptness,

"And so that pretty lass of thy master's is going to throw herself away on the wild rascal who pitched thee over the wall?"

Jabez could not trust himself to answer save by a movement of his head.

"Ugh! she'd better ha' takken a fancy to thee!"

Half-an-hour or more elapsed. Waking from a doze, he said—

"Dost thou remember my telling thee to look at 'Hogarth's Apprentices' in Chadwick's parlour?"

"Indeed, I do! They have influenced my life," answered Mr. Clegg with a sigh, pouring out a dose of medicine as he spoke.

"More physic, eh! Ugh! doctors kill more than they cure with their stuff! Ay, lad, thah'st mounted up, thou'lt be a master thyself some day, if thou dost not forget

that *Jabez* must be an *honourable* man!"

"I never did forget it, sir, even though the apprentice boy was mad enough to aspire to his master's daughter! But losing her, I have learned a new lesson. The prayer of the olden Jabez, which has been mine night and morn from boyhood, was a prayer for *self*, and *self* only, and I had no right to look for an answer to all the hopes I based upon it. If I have not been 'kept from evil,' and it *has* 'grieved me,' I prayed for myself *alone*, and in grief I have my answer. Prayer should take a wider range."

"Right, lad, right! now let me sleep."

When he waked again he remarked, "It's time for thee to be off, Jabez; but time is running faster with me than thee, lad. Here, reach yon Terence from the bureau. It is the Edinburgh edition. Keep it for the sake of the rough old Parson who gave thee thy name. And take care of it. Good night. How thick the fog is!" He

had lost the sight of one eye, and the other was rapidly going.

That was the ninth of November. When Jabez came again on the eleventh, the fog had cleared away from Joshua Brookes's sight for ever; and fountains of tears ran freely from many eyes for the hot, hasty, single-minded, and learned Parson whose name was a household word in the town, and who had ever been a kind friend to Jabez. In his life he had been at war with huckster-women, street-urchins, school-boys, and his ecclesiastical brethren. In his death the wide parish, and more than the parish, united to reverence his memory, those who had laughed loudest at his eccentricities being foremost to bewail him.

Even the November clouds hung thick and heavy as a pall over the Old Church and churchyard, crowded with mourners, when his silent remains were carried to their bed in the cross-aisles his feet had

trodden so many active years, and if others besides Jabez shed tears over the open and honoured grave, there was many an old creature mourning in solitude, besides the queer old woman in kerchief and mutch, who sat amongst her sweets in a closed shop, and lamented that "so young a man as Parson Brookes should be carried off before her."

"Well-a-day! and only sixty-seven! He'll want no more humbugs, and no more cakes for his pigeons. Poor Jotty!"

There was no mention of Jabez in his will, but when the young man took the old worn Terence sadly and reverently down from the shelf where he had first placed it, on turning over its leaves he found a bank note for £300 pinned to the fly-leaf, on which was inscribed his own name and that of the eccentric donor.

CHAPTER IX.

MARRIAGE!

HAD Jabez been vindictive, the opportunity, or at least the promise of revenge on his successful rival was not wanting. Various efforts had been made to call the Manchester Yeomanry to account for their doings at Peterloo, and many had been the overtures and suggestions to Jabez Clegg by members of the Radical party to join in the prosecution of the offenders. But he resolutely refused to identify the trooper who struck him, saying—

"I forgave the man at the time, believing him to be drunk, and incapable of discrimination. If I have since had reason

to think otherwise, I cannot be so mean as to allow private feeling to influence a public act."

It would be false to say there never was a tug at his heart-strings when the tempters were again at his elbow, before they made their final attempt in 1822. But he said to himself—

"If it would have been revengeful at the time when the bodily injury was fresh, it would be doubly revengeful, mean, and dishonourable now that he has supplanted me in love. And in striking at him I should wound Augusta, and that must never be."

The temptation to expose his adversary was set aside, and thus it was that Laurence Aspinall's name was not added to those of the four defenders on the record of the trial at Lancaster in April; and as that trial, after the examination of nearly a hundred witnesses of all ranks, terminated unsuccessfully for the prosecution, the forbear-

ance of our friend Jabez spared him at least the mortification of defeat.

The year rolled on. At the instance of Mr. Ashton, Jabez withdrew the bulk of his deposits from the Savings Bank, and adding to Joshua Brookes' gift the £200 he had accumulated by working late and early and saving small sums even during his apprenticeship, placed all in his master's hands, to be invested in the business and so return him a higher rate of interest. And this was the first absolute start of Jabez as a capitalist.

The joyous excitement attending Augusta's own preparations for her approaching nuptials was somewhat damped by the unaccountable condition of Ellen Chadwick, whose health, instead of improving during her visit to Carr Cottage, had appeared to decline still more perceptibly. A constant pain at her chest, frequent headaches, uncertain spirits, and increasing languor gave Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick real cause for un-

easiness; but Ellen would not hear of a doctor, and maintained that it was "nothing to trouble about," she should "be better soon."

But she did not get "better soon," and when the first August sun shone on Augusta's birthday and bridal, it taxed her powers to the utmost to sustain efficiently her part as bridesmaid.

Had Captain Travis accepted his lieutenant's invitation to be groomsman, she would have found it still more difficult; but a comparative stranger, a Mr. Joseph Bennett, of Gorton, filled the post, the bride's father having objected very decidedly to bold Ned Barret.

Yet Ben Travis and Jabez Clegg were both among the guests, albeit it cost each a struggle. The two had mutually strengthened each other as such friends should, arriving at the Spartan decision to "suffer and be silent, facing their fate like men." And indeed, old Mr. Ashton had

wrung the hand of Jabez at least a week before, and said—

"I'm sorry for you, Clegg; I am, upon my soul; and I'm sorry for our poor lass too, for she's made a mistake. But keep a brave heart, and don't let that slashing yeomanry fellow crow over you. As Mrs. Ashton would say, 'What can't be cured must be endured,' and we must all of us show the best face at the wedding that we can."

If that meant elaborate display in dress and decorations, and provision for the bridal breakfast and dinner, then the face exhibited was a shining one. Mrs. Hodgson, the fashionable mantua-maker and milliner of Oldham Street (where two or three of the private houses had already been converted into shops), had kept her apprentices at work almost night and day for weeks, executing bridal orders from the Ashtons and their friends. A very snowstorm might have passed through the

work-room, such heaps of white French crape and satin, lace and organdi, lute-string and gauze, littered and covered available space, putting matronly brocade, velvet, and llama quite into the shade.

The warehouse saw little of Mrs. Ashton for a week or ten days previously. Cicily, who had gone over to the Aspinalls, had begged to be allowed to help Kezia for that occasion; and she roasted her own face in spinning gold and silver webs and baskets from sugar for the table, making "floating islands," syllabubs, trifles, jellies, and blanc-mange to supplement the solid dishes Kezia dressed with so much skill. And Mr. Mabbott sent in a "Temple of Hymen" and a bride's cake prepared six weeks in advance.

The bride, alternately radiant and tearful like an April day, veiled with lace, and crowned with white rose-buds and orange-blossoms, wore a low-bodiced dress of white satin, festooned round the narrow

skirt with costly lace, whilst on neck and arms, and in her tiny ears, were negligé, bracelets, and earrings of pearl, the gift of the gallant bridegroom's gallant father.

The bridegroom was scarcely less resplendent in his high-collared blue coat and gold buttons, his white waistcoat buttoned to match, his glossy white trousers, and low shoes tied with a bunch of silk ferret. An oblong brooch set with a rim of pearls held down his broad fine shirt-frills; from his fob hung a huge bunch of gold seals pendent from a flat gold watch-chain; and in his hand (not crushing his elaborate curls, now clustering richly as ever) he carried a hat of white beaver of the newest shape.

To Mr. and Mrs. Ashton it was a matter of open regret that Joshua Brookes, who had christened Augusta, should not have lived to marry her also; but Mr. Aspinall, whose reminiscences of the old chaplain were of another order, was much better satisfied

to see his own personal friend Parson Gatliffe, the *bon vivant*, behind the altar-rails.

If the bride was tall and graceful, with sunshine in her eyes and in her classic curls, tall and stately was the bride's mother, whose long train of purple silk velvet swept the aisles, though trains had ceased to be general. There was no faltering over the responses. There was a glow of modest pride on the cheek of Augusta; a look of mingled ardour and exultation on the face of Laurence; his "*I will*" was pronounced with a force which was almost fierce, yet, as she faintly promised to "obey," he pressed her hand with smiling significance.

The ceremony over, the bride did not faint, but turning to her tearful-eyed father, threw her arms around his neck and clung to him, whispering how grateful she was that he had given her the man of her choice, and that he should see what a

good wife she would make; and the impromptu embrace sent a shower of snuff over white satin and lace.

Yet some one fainted, whom Ben Travis caught in his strong arms and carried to the church door for air: a dark-haired, black-eyed bridesmaid, whose face was white and skin transparent as her own robe.

Custom had not set its imperative seal on the wedding tour as a necessity, but after a magnificent solid dinner, to which the party did full justice, and an elaborate dessert, during which the cake was cut, and Mr. Aspinall proposed the health of the bride in an inflated toast, demanding that it should be drunk in bumpers, "and no heel-taps," the wedded pair drove off in Mr. Aspinall's carriage to the family mansion at Fallowfield, there to spend the honeymoon.

"Good-bye, Jabez," said Augusta, putting her small soft hand into his as they

left the house; "you will comfort my father and mother, will you not? I trust them to you."

And he replied with the fervency of truth, "I accept the trust willingly. Good-bye, Mrs. Aspinall" (how the word choked him!). "May God bless you, and the marriage you have contracted. Good-bye!"

He did not kiss her hand, had not taken the common liberty of guests to kiss the bride's lips in church; he did but press her hand as any old friend who had grown up with her under the same roof might have done; but before the carriage had well dashed from the door, or the bridegroom had fairly settled himself on his seat, Laurence turned to the fair young wife, whose prophetic tears were now falling fast, with the sharp rebuke—

"What was that foundling fellow mumbling over your hand? You will please to remember that that hand is mine now, Mrs.

Aspinall. You have promised to *love* and *obey* me—ME your LORD and MASTER. And MASTER I mean to be. I have borne the fooling of your friends and your own pretty caprices long enough. It is my turn now; and if any man so much as dares to look at you I'll pound him to a jelly! And now dry your eyes and give me a kiss!"

And that was the inauguration of Augusta Aspinall's married life.

It has been said that the bridesmaid fainted. Every lady carried a smelling-bottle, and means to revive her were not far to seek. She soon recovered, and with a sensitive blush withdrew from the arms which had been so proud to sustain her, casting her eyes round as if in search of some other whose service might have been more acceptable. But she suffered no relapse. She was ready to wait upon the bride, to sign "Ellen Chadwick" in the church register, and to assist Mr. Joseph Bennett in cutting up the cake for distribu-

tion, with cards and gloves, to friends not present. It was an arduous task, and she succumbed before it was half completed.

"Miss Chadwick, you are not well; let me relieve you," said Jabez, coming to her assistance after the "happy pair" had driven off, and whilst peals of laughter, shouts, and hurrahs came from the dining-room where gentlemen were honouring the bridal by drinking themselves senseless and speechless.

Ellen remained with her aunt a few days longer, during which Jabez, exceedingly pained to see the ravages hidden disease had made in so estimable a young lady, was pitifully attentive.

He could not, however, fail to see that his attentions distressed her; and, on the whole, he was not sorry when Augusta's parents and he were left to themselves, to talk of their own dear one and speculate on her future.

Weeks went by. Mrs. Aspinall visited

her old home, but never without her husband; and seldom was she allowed to remain more than an hour. Her spirits seemed exuberant, but somehow her unusual vivacity jarred on her mother's nerves, and she suspected that her spirits were forced.

Meanwhile Ellen Chadwick faded. Dr. Hardie, called in at last, watched his patient with curious and attentive eye, perplexed and dubious. He had been friend as well as physician since Mr. Chadwick's attack of paralysis, and was a close observer. Now he came and went in a gossiping sort of way, to put his patient at ease, and off her guard. He was there one day when Jabez was announced, and saw a sudden spasmodic action of the face, a dilation of the pupils, a scarcely perceptible pant and parting of the lips, and then he watched her closer. He introduced Mr. Clegg's name, as if casually, whilst his fingers were on her pulse. The result of

his observations were told to Mr. Chadwick the same day.

"Your daughter has no specific disease, Mr. Chadwick. She is simply *love-sick*."

"L-love-s-sick?"

"Yes; and her secret passion is consuming her. Medicine cannot save the patient's life if her affection be not returned, and that right speedily."

Mr. Chadwick was aghast.

"I feared as much," said Mrs. Chadwick, with a sigh.

"Then you will have an inkling who is the desired object?" said the doctor.

"I think so."

"Does your maternal instinct point to Mr. Clegg?" he asked, with a curious look.

"It does; but he himself has no suspicion, and I am sure regards Ellen only as a friend—a friend elevated a little above him."

"Is the young man courting?"

"I believe not."

"Then," said the doctor sententiously, "the sooner he is, the better for Miss Chadwick. Her life is not worth a month's purchase unless Mr. Clegg become the buyer. But let not Miss Ellen hear a whisper of my opinion. Good day."

And snatching up his hat the doctor departed, leaving them to their reflections.

Here was a delicate subject to be dealt with, and that without either loss of time or the sacrifice of their beloved child's sensitiveness and reserve.

Unknown to Ellen a family conclave assembled under the Mosley Street roof, to discuss the momentous question, and deliberate what was best to be done. Long and grave were their deliberations. At length, taking Mr. Chadwick's imperfect speech into consideration, Mr. Ashton consented to lay the case before Jabez, and leave his brother-in-law to supplement it, if necessary; though opinions were divided as to the result.

It was after business hours, and Mr. Ashton found Jabez in his own room, doing his best to dissipate thought by hard work, mind and hand being busy with a chintz-pattern for calico-printing.

There was a nervous plunge into the gold snuff-box, and a consequent flourish of a gay bandana, and some time spent in examining the incomplete design on the desk, before Mr. Ashton could fairly enter on his embassy. After a little prelude, in which, whilst enlarging on the serious nature of his niece's illness, he elicited from Jabez that he held the young lady in the very highest esteem, and was deeply grieved to hear of her perilous state, he put down his snuff-box on the table before him, and drawing up his chair so as to bring their heads closer together, looked steadfastly into the other's clear eyes as he put the question—

"And what should you think of *love* as the cause of her malady?"

"Love!" echoed Jabez, his mind running off to the agonised confession made to him on the Taxal hillside.

"Yes, *love*, and for the very man whose merits *my* foolish child failed to see."

Jabez looked at him vaguely.

"Surely not Mr. Marsland!"

"Pah! no!" exclaimed Mr. Ashton, as if disgusted at his obtuseness. "Yourself, man—Jabez Clegg."

Jabez fixed his eyes on his informant in blank amazement, a monosyllabic long-drawn "*Me!*" being his sole response.

"Just so!" assented Mr. Ashton, and he took a pinch of snuff on the strength of it.

"Oh, sir, there must be some mistake! How has this been ascertained? Has Miss Chadwick made——"

"No, Clegg, the poor lass has never said one word, except with her eyes and pulse. Dr. Hardie has made the discovery now, and it turns out Mrs. Chadwick suspected it long ago."

"Oh, dear! dear! this is very terrible!"

He was estimating the pain in Ellen's heart by that in his own.

"Very terrible indeed, Clegg, for Hardie says the lass's life is not worth so much as a yard of filleting if her love meets no return."

The head of Jabez sank in his open hands upon the table. What would his friend Travis think of all this? Presently he raised his face, over which a strange change had passed.

"Mr. Ashton, what would you have me do?"

"Whatever Jabez Clegg thinks he ought to do," he answered steadily, adding in another tone, "I would have been glad to have given thee my own child: my brother-in-law implores thee to take *his* child, to save her life."

After a prolonged silence Jabez spoke.

"Mr. Ashton, I hold that love alone can sanctify marriage: my love has blos-

somed and died fruitless. Yet so highly do I esteem Miss Chadwick, and so proud am I of the great honour she has done me in her preference, that I place myself in your hands. If I can spare so amiable a young lady the pain I suffer from rejected love, I should be a brute and a savage to refuse her the remnant of a valueless life. We may at least soften its asperities for each other."

The Chadwicks went home with minds relieved, but Jabez had stipulated that nothing should be said to Ellen of their overtures to him, no hint given which could alarm her shrinking modesty.

The following day he called to inquire about her health, made his genuine anxiety apparent, and noted as he had never done before how her lip trembled and her eyelid drooped. Gradually, as his attentions became more marked, her health and spirits rose, and when at last he proposed to her calmly, quietly, as though

he sought a haven when the frothy waves of a first passion had subsided, she accepted him as God's best gift, all unaware that his offer was not spontaneous, or that her cousin Augusta was yet deeply shrined in his secret heart.

He had been at first greatly concerned about Ben Travis, but the generous fellow, to whom he felt in honour bound to explain his conduct, only wrung his hand and said—

"I could not resign her to a worthier."

CHAPTER X.

BLOWS.

RICHARD CHADWICK, who had served as a midshipman under Admiral Collingwood, and shared in the victory of Trafalgar, was a midshipman still, and his vessel had long been away on a foreign station. Few, brief, and far between had been his opportunities to visit home and friends. Ships had been paid off, but he had been exchanged, several years had elapsed since he had set foot in Manchester, and the hearts of his kin yearned towards their sailor.

His very whereabouts was unknown to them, and when written communication

was necessary, letters had to be forwarded through the Admiralty.

Ellen's engagement and prospective marriage called forth a voluminous epistle, crossed and recrossed like a trellis, from Mrs. Chadwick to her son, whose presence she craved, if leave of absence could possibly be obtained. The letter was a singular compound of gratulation and apology, through which a thin undercurrent of dissatisfaction meandered like a stream. His sister's strange malady and infatuation for a man of apparently low origin, whose name and parentage were alike unknown, were set forth to be deplored. Still, since the sole remedy for Ellen's ailment rested with this obscure Mr. Clegg, whose career upwards, from his floating cradle to his honourable position in the Ashton house and warehouse, was circumstantially detailed, his personal worth was a matter for congratulation; and the deep obligation of the whole

family to him for the service rendered on Peterloo-Day seemed dragged in as a sort of extenuating circumstance. Clearly the Mr. Travis whose name and pretensions cropped up here and there throughout the letter would have been a more acceptable son-in-law in the sight of Mrs. Chadwick and his other sister, Charlotte Walmsley, and just as clearly it was made apparent that his paralysed father (hale and strong in all other respects) was as much infatuated with the young man as was Ellen, having "positively offered to take him into partnership on his entrance into the family." And even there Mrs. Chadwick felt "constrained to admit that the clear head, business tact, and energy of Mr. Clegg would be a great acquisition."

This item of news closed the missive, which must have gone a circuitous round of red tape it was so long upon its travels. Months came and went; Father Christmas shook his snowy locks over the town; but

neither the midshipman nor a written substitute put in an appearance.

Meanwhile Jabez, who had crushed down in the garden of his heart those roots of his love for Augusta which mocked his strength to eradicate, did his best to plant and foster above them a grateful affection for the one who had chosen him, and hoped in time that the newer growth might utterly extinguish the old. His attentions to Ellen were more assiduous than, under the circumstances, might have been expected; but he argued with himself—

"I must endeavour to atone to her for a proposal in which love had no part. She must never have occasion to suspect the truth. I should be a brute did I remain insensible to the unconquerable love she has so long cherished in secret for me. Augusta's face, alas! was more divinely fair, her manner more enchanting; but Ellen, though she is older than myself, will doubtless make the best wife for a business

man who has to carve his way to fortune, and *she loves me!*"

Ellen, too, had her seasons of doubt and perplexity. She had been so sensitively alive to the silent homage of Jabez Clegg to her younger and fairer cousin that at first her mind had refused to realise the fact that he desired to marry her, even though his proposal had been preceded by direct and palpable attention. She had been at first inclined to attribute his many acts of kindness and courtesy to friendship, and compassion for her failing health. And when he had spoken of being won by her many estimable qualities to seek her for a wife, she had listened incredulously; then, overpowered by contending emotions, sank back amongst her cushions in a state of insensibility. Even her tremulous acceptance had been uttered as in a blissful dream, which might vanish all too soon. From time to time she perplexed herself with questions of the motive for so sudden

a change in one so steadfast as Jabez, and at last wavered between the two suppositions that Augusta's wilfulness had wearied him, or that she owed her lover to pique. Of the real state of the case she had no inkling.

She was not alone in her latter supposition.

"A happy new year to you, Mrs. Clowes!" said our friend Jabez to his friend the old confectioner, as at one stride he took the two steps to her confined shop on the bright frosty second of January, 1823, and extended his hand to her across the counter, where she still kept up a show of activity in spite of age and wrinkles.

"Same to you, Mr. Clegg."

She had been one of the first to recognise his right to the prefix, and with all her old-fashioned familiarity never dropped it.

"Eh, but now I look at thee, thah doesn't

look ower bright an' happy;" and she peered into his face inquiringly.

He smiled.

"Looks are not always to be relied on. I ought to be happy, for I am about to be married, and my errand hither is to——"

She interrupted him with—

"So I've heard. But what o' that? Is she th' reet un? For I wouldna give a mince-pie for thi happiness if she isna."

The blood mounted painfully to his forehead.

"Miss Chadwick is all that is estimable and amiable, Mrs. Clowes," he answered steadily, "and if I am not happy with her it will be my own fault."

The old dame was not satisfied. The white linen lappets of her antiquated mutch flapped like a spaniel's ears as she shook her head.

"Eh, well!" sighed she, opening and shutting a drawer in the counter abstract-

edly, "you should know best, but both me and Parson Brookes (dead and gone as he is) thought you'd set your mind on the lass that rantipollin lad Aspinall snapped up. I hope thah's not goin' to wed th' cousin out o' spite," and she looked up in his face, over which a cloud had swept. "It would be the worst day's work you ever did, either for her or you."

He had mastered his emotion, and answered cheerfully—

"Make your mind easy, Mrs. Clowes. I am not marrying from any unworthy motive, and I think our prospect of happiness is about the average. I came to ask you, as the oldest friend I have in the town, to be present on the occasion."

Mrs. Clowes was overpowered.

"What! Mr. Clegg! Me, in my old black stuff gown and mutch, among your grand folk? Nay, nay; I'm too old to don weddin' garments. But I tell you what"—and her face puckered with pride

and pleasure—"you shall have the finest wedding-cake that ever was baked i' Manchester, and the old woman will mebbe look on the weddin' from some quiet nook, out o' the way. It's a thousand pities Jotty is not alive to marry you!"

"There will be no grand folk, Mrs. Clowes; I am but a poor man struggling upwards, and Miss Chadwick has not had good health of late; so we shall be married very quietly on Wednesday week. Only very near relatives, or old friends, are invited."

Customers interrupted the colloquy. When the shop was clear, she asked where he was going to live after marriage, and was told with his bride's parents.

"Eh! but that's a bad look out. Now, I've built some houses in a new street off Oxford Road as they call Rosamund Street, an' I tell you what, you shall have one to live in at a peppercorn rent, and I'll lend

you the money to furnish it. Young folks are best by themselves."

Clear and bright were the eyes that met hers in reply.

"Thank you, Mrs. Clowes, thank you heartily for your kind offer; but I think you lose sight of Mr. Chadwick's infirmity. He has acted very liberally towards me—in fact, has offered to take me into partnership—and I should ill repay him by removing from his hearth the good daughter on whom he relies. It is rather my duty to add to the comfort of his declining years."

"Oh!" said she sharply; "if that's how you raise your crust I'd best keep my fingers out of your pie."

Jabez was going. The shop was full.

"Stay, Mr. Clegg," said she, beckoning him into her parlour, and closing the door. "It's hard cheese for a man to owe everything to his father-in-law. I've got £500

hanging on hand. It's not much, but the least bit of capital would make you feel independent, and it's heartily at your service; and if you don't like to take it without interest, you can pay me one per cent., and repay me when you've made a fortune; and if that doesn't come till I lie under a stone bed-quilt, you can hand it over to my first godchild."

That same evening Augusta Aspinall stood before a large oval swing-glass in her luxurious dressing-room, the blazing fire shed its warm glow on polished furniture, amber-silk hangings, bright fire-irons, costly mirrors, and expensive toilet ware (of execrable shape). She was robing for a ball at the Assembly Rooms, and Cicily, who although cook, insisted on retaining her post as lady's maid on such occasions, had just fastened the last hook of a delicate lilac figured silk as soft as it was lustrous, with swansdown fringing skirt, sleeves, and bodice, as if to show how fair was the sym-

metrical neck of the wearer to stand such test.

In came Laurence fresh from the Spread Eagle in Hanging Ditch, where he, a newly-elected member of the Scramble Club, had spent the afternoon with one or two others, forgetful that the origin of the club was the fourpenny pie and glass of ale, or at most the slice from a joint despatched in a hurry or "scramble" by business men to whom time was money.

Neither time nor money seemed of much value to Mr. Laurence, who was equally lavish with both, taking as much from his father's business and adding as little as could well be imagined. His step on the threshold caused Augusta to turn round, beaming and beautiful, and dart towards him, exclaiming—

"I'm so glad you've come!" simultaneously with his "Clear out, Cis!" and a warm embrace which somewhat disarranged the dainty dress. His wife was yet a new toy,

and his passion had not had time to evaporate. She was a something to admire and exhibit for admiration as a possession of his own; and though her love had received one or two rude shocks, he was still a glorified being in her eyes, and she clung to him as a true wife should cling. She was still but a girl in her teens, proud of the admiration she excited. Disengaging herself, she cried—

"Oh, Laurence, see how you have crushed my swan's-down! and now, dear, do make haste and dress, we shall be so late," and putting the fluffy trimming in order, she unlocked a small jewel-case on the table, and took thence the pearls she had worn on her wedding-day.

"What will you say for these, Augusta?" cried he, dangling before her eyes a gossamer scarf and an exquisite ivory fan, whilst his other arm thrown over her white shoulders again threatened the elastic down.

"Oh, Laurence, you are a darling!

Where did these beautiful things come from?" and she gave him more than one kiss in payment.

"India, my love; they are 'far-fetched and dear-bought,' and so must be good for you, my lady. I met your uncle Chadwick with an old sea-captain, from whom I bought them. By the way, matrimony seems catching. We are invited to a wedding," and he began leisurely to undress as he spoke.

"A wedding! Whose?"

He laughed.

"Ah, woman all over! I thought I had news for you. Guess!"

In small things as well as great it was his delight to tantalize, so he kept her guessing whilst he proceeded with his toilet, and she began to clasp her pearls on arms and neck, and in her pretty ears.

"Well," said he at length, "who but your cousin Ellen!"

"Ellen?" She had gone so little near

her own family that this was indeed news for her.

"Yes; I thought she meant to die an old maid, but it seems she's not too proud to wear your cast-off slippers."

"My cast-off slippers? What do you mean?" and she paused whilst clasping her bracelet with a look of bewildered interrogation.

"Now, Augusta, pray don't look so innocent!—Your father's favourite fetch-and-carry, that sneaking, canting fox, Jabez Clegg, finding that Miss Ashton was a sour grape, has straightway gone wooing to Miss Ashton's cousin, as fruit ripe enough and near enough to drop into his vulpine jaws; and by G—— the girl has had no more spirit than to drop when he shook the boughs, rather than hang on untasted!"

The speaker's lip and nose had curled with contempt as he began, then his nostril dilated, and he struck his wet hand on the

washstand with a force which threatened the earthenware and set it jingling.

Augusta was not yet schooled to silence: her generous spirit rose to repel these allegations.

"Oh, Laurence, how can you? Ellen has had plenty of admirers; she has no need to wear anyone's cast-off shoes. And as for Mr. Clegg! He is no cast-off slip" ——she checked herself; a thousand trivial and forgotten things flashed across her mind at once; there was no doubt that Jabez had aspired to her own hand—he must have offered himself to Ellen in pique, to look as if he didn't care; she could not add the "of mine," which should have rounded her sentence; she substituted, with barely a moment's pause, "He is neither a sneak nor a cant, and if Ellen marries him she will have a good husband;" adding, with marvellously little tact or knowledge of her own husband, "I'm sure, Laurence, dear, you have no right to

speak ill of the man who saved your life in the very pond that is frozen over now before our doors! And you cannot really think him mercenary, when he refused the £500 your father offered as a reward for his bravery."

Not lightning was more quick and scathing than the fury which flashed from her husband's eyes and almost paralysed his tongue, as the last words fell from her lips. With the damp towel in his hand he struck across her beautiful bare shoulders with a force which traced red lines upon their snow; then marked her round arm with a band as red by tearing away the suspended fan and scarf, which he threw behind the fire without thought of one either "far-fetched" or "dear-bought."

"Soh, madam!" he hissed rather than spoke, whilst Augusta shrank from him in affright, "soh! you dare defend the wretch who played the spy on us at Carr—attacked me, an unarmed man, with a stick, like

a coward, and left me bleeding there for dead, hoping to win the heiress for himself!"

From her father and Cicily both she had gathered the truth of that night's exploits. His misrepresentations no longer misled; but for very fear she held her peace.

He went on—

"Madam, that night's savage attack cancelled every debt of gratitude I owed the calculating knave who turned his back on my father's £500, thinking to multiply it by thousands from *your* father!"

"It is not true!" she dared to say, her sense of justice and her spirit of resistance rising in defence of one she knew to be foully aspersed. Not because he was Jabez Clegg, but because he was an absentee maligned.

A shriek rang through the big house, and servants came scurrying up with Mr. Aspinall in their midst; and Cicily, the first to dash between them, caught on her

well-covered back the blow from the madman's brace, which would else have fallen afresh on the naked shoulders of his wife, already scored by it with livid welts.

Carry away the fainting lady—soothe the infuriated savage—apply raw beef to shoulders as red, if not as raw—let the brute steep himself in brandy unto stupefaction. The morning will come, when the fumes of passion and brandy will alike have passed away, and the man will repent him of his cruelty. But the sting of groundless jealousy will remain, and the broad livid stripes across the white shoulders. Time and care will efface those marks, but neither kisses, nor caresses, nor presents, nor time itself can obliterate the hieroglyphics stamped with that buckskin brace on the young wife's heart. He has fixed the name of Jabez Clegg there, and in conjunction "brute" and "liar," as equivalent to his own.

It might have been expected after this

that the Aspinalls would have been conspicuous by their absence from the cousin's wedding, or that Augusta might have laid her wrongs before her mother. But, no; your jealous man never spares himself a pang if he hopes to inflict one; and the wilful woman who finds she has made a mistake in marriage is the last to confess it.

Cold weather and recent indisposition served as an apology for the violet velvet spencer which, worn above the pale lilac silk, covered bust and neck; and it was far from unbecoming either to the young matron or the occasion.

Old Mrs. Clowes—who had kept her word anent the cake, which was a triumph of confectionery skill—from some long-closed coffer brought forth a stiff brocade of ancient make and texture, placed a bonnet on her unaccustomed head, and from a far seat in the choir watched Jabez Clegg enter with his college friend and

groomsman, stalwart George Pilkington, though she did not see them linger to read the inscription over the grave of Joshua Brookes, or look up with grateful remembrance to the Chetham Gallery, where they had worshipped together. But she remembered them as boys in long blue gowns and yellow under-skirts, and could not help contrasting the college dress of the past with the high-collared bright blue coats, the gilt buttons, lemon-coloured vests, light trousers, and white kid gloves, in which they found their way to her to shake hands, whilst waiting for the trembling white-robed bride and her friends.

And there Mrs. Clowes sat and listened to the irrevocable words which bound Jabez to "love and cherish" the woman who loved him with her whole soul; whilst in spite of himself his very brain was reeling with memories of that other wedding-day, when Laurence Aspinall and Augusta Ashton, now standing calm and beautiful

in the background, had breathed the self-same vows before that altar; and somehow the old dame had a secret misgiving when all was over that it was "*not* the reet one after all."

"All over!" had been the cry from the heart of Jabez then. "All over!" was the echo now, as the last "Amen" sounded, and he registered a silent oath, not down in the rubric, to keep the troth he had plighted, although no electric thrill answered the shy touch of Ellen's hand, or the dumb devotion of her glance, and although Augusta's greeting of her new "cousin" jarred a still sensitive nerve.

All over! so men delude themselves. "All over!" they say, when disappointment closes the door of the past, and veils their eyes to the vista of the future. "All over!" when the curtain falls on the prologue of life's drama. Yet it rises again, and they find that the play has but just begun.

CHAPTER XI.

PARTNERSHIP.

BY dint of persuasion old Mrs. Clowes was induced to place her well-saved brocade at the table graced by the wedding-cake she had manufactured; though, as she afterwards said confidentially to Jabez, "I must have had as much brass in my face as I had i' my pocket to sit down cheek-by-jowl wi' grand folks with foine manners, who might come into my shop th' next day to be served with a pound o' gingerbread; but I'd not ha' missed Mester Ashton's toast for summat. And I don't know as annybody turned up a nose bout it

wur that spark Aspinall, who owes me for manny a quarter a pound of humbugs."

Round that hospitable and subtantial wedding-breakfast, which owed much of its success to the bride's own deft fingers, also gathered the Cloughs, who had watched the career of the bridegroom with interest from his cradle—Miss Clough as bridesmaid; Mr. John M'Connel and Henry Liverseege, who had cultivated his friendship from their first introduction; John Walmsley and Charlotte, who privately chafed at his reception into the family; and Augusta, whose brilliancy was somewhat dimmed by the overt watchfulness of too courteous and attentive Laurence; but there was no Ben Travis, and missing him, Jabez was disposed to gravity. But though there were uncongenial elements present, George Pilkington's cheery voice and lively sallies sufficed to set mirth afoot and keep her dancing; whilst Mrs. Ashton, stately and proverbial, seemed to share some pleasant

secret with which Mr. Chadwick and her husband were on the *qui vive*.

It was the age for toasts and sentiments. Some smart and witty things had been uttered, but not until the cake was cut and commended, and a post-chaise at the door waited to convey the newly-married pair to Carr Cottage and the earliest friends of the bridegroom, did Mr. Ashton rise to his feet, snuff-box in hand, and with a merry twinkle in his eye propose—

"Success to the new partnership!"

"Stop, my friends!" said he, as glasses were elevated in honour of the toast; "perhaps I had better explain what is meant by the new partnership."

"I should think that was pretty obvious," whispered Laurence to his friend Walmsley across the table, but he changed his opinion presently.

"There are partnerships for life," continued Mr. Ashton, "where the contract is attested in church, as we have had the pleas-

ure of witnessing to-day, and, I am sure, with the best of wishes for its success; and there are partnerships in business, which are usually signed, sealed, and attested in a lawyer's office; and it is to such a one I now refer, in conjunction with the former."

He paused to consult his snuff-box, and smiled to see how suddenly inattentive heads were eagerly bent forward to listen.

"It may not be generally known that my dear *nephew* Jabez, at the close of his honourable apprenticeship, declined an eligible offer from brother Chadwick, in order to remain with us."

(Walmsley and Aspinall exchanged glances. Mrs. Clowes looked knowing.)

"It may not be generally known that he has a small amount of capital invested in our concern at present."

("Small enough, I should say," muttered Laurence.)

"Now, there being no likelihood that his son Richard will ever leave his ship for a

warehouse, Mr. Chadwick proposed to take his son-in-law Jabez into equal partnership, considering his integrity, his business tact, and energy to be equivalent to capital."

"Hear! hear!" in which Mr. Chadwick's stumbling tongue was loudest, and "Success to the new partnership!"

(The snuff-box closed, the bandana was disposed of, the speaker's beaming face was all in a glow.)

"Stop! stop, gentlemen! not so fast. You will have to fill your glasses afresh. We have not yet got to the new partnership."

("What the d——l is he driving at?" was Aspinall's polite query to Walmsley, who shook his head in token of ignorance.)

"Brother Chadwick had concluded that Mr. Clegg was wholly without capital, whereas he happens to have more than a thousand pounds at his disposal."

(Broadcloth made sudden acquaintance with chairbacks. George Pilkington

grasped his friend's hand; there was a puckering of Mrs. Clowes's wrinkles; there were lowering brows from Laurence and John.)

"And Mr. Clegg being perfectly satisfied with his present investment, and anxious to join the gingham manufacturer without quitting the small-ware manufacturer, pro—posed"—pinch of snuff—"that the *two concerns should be amalgamated*, and he have a share. Gentlemen and ladies, the proposal was hailed as an inspiration; and as soon as the change can be legally effected, the firm will be gazetted as 'Ashton, Chadwick, and Clegg!' And now let us drink—'Success to the new partnerships, matrimonial and commercial!"

Aspinall's voice alone remained silent amongst the enthusiastic cheers with which the toast was drunk. Ellen, with humid eyes, escaped to change her garments, and Augusta also rose; but as she passed the new Manchester Man, around whom friends crowded with congratulations, she put out

her hand with a smile, and said, "Cousin Jabez, I wish success to both your partnerships with all my heart."

Laurence was at her elbow, apparently to lead her with courteous ceremony from the room, and whilst offering one hand with a graceful inclination of his head, he contrived with the other to pinch the upper part of her arm, and to whisper in her ear, between his set teeth—

"D—n you, madam! You shall smart for this!"

An irrepressible ejaculation of pain burst from her. More than one turned round. There was real concern on the brow of Jabez as he asked—

"What is the matter, Mrs. Aspinall? Are you hurt?"

She made light of it.

"Oh, nothing, nothing. I struck my foot against a chair—that was all."

But Jabez saw the white, frightened face, and felt there was something more;

and that scared look haunted him for many a day.

Laurence attended his wife to the staircase, smiling blandly whilst within sight or earshot. Ere he left her at the stair-foot he gripped her tiny hand till her jewelled rings cut the flesh ; and the smile became satanic as he whispered—

"You are discreet, madam. I charge you to remain so—for your life!"

Once in Ellen's crowded bedchamber she became hysterical, to her cousin's great grief. But she overmastered her emotion by a violent effort, excused it on the plea of recent indisposition, and was consoled by her mother and other sagacious matrons with the remark that such affections might be expected. The newly-married pair were whirled away down Oldham Street and up Piccadilly ; old Mrs. Clowes took her departure, and then Augusta, acting on Mrs. Clough's advice, lay on the drawing-room sofa to rest.

Not until night did the guests depart, Mr. Liverseege being the first to retire. There was a late dinner at six o'clock, and when the gentlemen rose from their post-prandial wine, and sought the drawing-room, all considerably elevated, Laurence Aspinall was too intoxicated to move. The Aspinall carriage had been waiting an hour. The coachman and Bob the groom grew anxious and impatient about the horses.

"Mr. Laurence drunk? Eh! that matters nowt!" exclaimed the latter. "Steve an' me 'll manage him." And taking the limp young Hercules between them, they somehow hauled him to the carriage, and ensconced him in one corner, with his head drooping on his breast.

Augusta shrank from joining him, afraid lest he should awake to malicious consciousness on the road.

"Oh! I dare not go home with him! Indeed, I dare not go home with him!"

"My dear," said her mother, gravely,

"I am afraid you *must*. A wife cannot absent herself from home because her lord and master indulges in too much wine, even though he may occasionally make a beast of himself. It is too late to think of this *now*. What cannot be cured must be endured. As you made your own bed, you will have to lie on it to the end. Those who leave the spring for the stream must expect muddy water. However, there is nothing so bad but it might be worse. Once is not always, and love overlooks lapses."

Augusta's persistence that she dared not be "shut up with him alone," caused Mrs. Ashton to say,

"Well, my daughter, the occasion has been so unusual that even your own father has taken more wine than his wont, or he might bear you company. That groom seems a steady man; suppose he rides inside to support his master; and whatever you do, remember when wine is

in wit is out, silence is a wife's safeguard, and you will have to make the best of a bad bargain."

A month back Augusta would have tossed her head, and laughed lightly at her mother's pet philosophy. That night she rode home from Jabez Clegg's wedding-feast with a groom and a drunken man, pondering whether spirited resentment or tame submission was her best course. The morning dawned on a wife pinched black and blue, with hardly strength or spirit to sob.

Then followed a reaction, and a period of remorseful uxorious penitence, during which Laurence submitted with a tolerable grace to a lecture from Mr. Aspinall, who saw that something was amiss; and chivalrous gallantry towards woman being part of this gentleman's creed he did not spare his son.

Nor did Laurence spare himself. He knelt at his wife's feet, called her "an angel," and

himself "a savage," implored her forgiveness, excused his jealousy on the ground of passionate love, lavished his means on extravagant gifts for her, and exhausted language in fair promises. But so proud was he of his wife's beauty that he must needs exhibit at theatre and assembly the jewel he had won; whilst the admiration she had excited set his jealous brain on fire, and she paid the penalty in the silence of night, or even in the close carriage driving home.

But his contrition and the old plea of "excessive love" for his jealous infirmity won her over, and not even Cicily more than suspected half his cruelty.

Great preparations had been made at Whaley-Bridge for the reception of Mr. and Mrs. Clegg: the factory windows were extra burnished; the landlord of the White Hart hoisted a flag; the mill-hands lined the road to greet them; the

avenue gate was thrown open that the chaise might drive on to the cottage; somebody had put Crazy Joe into a new suit of clothes for the occasion, and he stood by the side of little Sim on the step of the Gothic arch (the greater child of the twain) to laugh and chuckle a welcome, as sincere in its way as the homely greetings of the orphan's fosterers.

It was a fine stalwart young man, of open but grave countenance, around whom Bess threw her motherly arms, while Tom Hulme helped the bride to alight, and marshalled the way for the pair, who followed arm-in-arm into the house-place, where Simon, stiff with age and rheumatism, kept possession of the padded chair set apart for the sick or aged.

In some way the knowledge that Mr. Clegg came as a master, and not as a servant, had preceded him.

"Eh, Jabez, lad," exclaimed Simon, tears of joy coursing down his cheeks, "that

aw should ever live to see this day! Would annyone ha' thowt as th' little lass at' played wi' ar Jabez an' his toys, an' kissed him when he wur a babby, would come to wed him when he wur a mon—an' a gentlemon into th' bargain! An' neaw let thi wife goo an' tak' off her pelisse, while thah talks to me; hoo 'll be tired wi' th' lung journey, aw reckon. Theere's a fire i' th' best parlour, that's th' place fur gentlefolk, an' yo'r supper's laid theer."

Old Simon naturally concluded that young lovers wanted no society but each other. On five-year-old Sim such a consciousness had not yet dawned, and so he penetrated into the "best parlour," and, much to the relief of the bridegroom, broke into that first domestic *tête-à-tête* to exhibit some wonderful pictures he had drawn with red ruddle picked from the gravel-path.

They had been at Carr Cottage little more than ten days or a fortnight, the first

week being wet; Jabez, without neglecting Ellen, busied himself with contemplated changes and improvements at the mill, and thus the great bane of the modern honeymoon was avoided. The occupation thus found for the mind and hand of Jabez at that particular epoch of his life was a blessing for which Ellen had need to be thankful in after-years, if she had but known it.

As it was, she did fancy he might have given her a *little* more of his time, and not have needed her suggestion to revisit Taxal and the spot where he had wooed her for another, and not for himself. Yet a very slight hint was sufficient, and, taking advantage of a clear, dry day, the two re-trod the old path by the Goyt, which awoke reminiscences that could but be flattering to that self-love of which every human being has a share.

Sitting down as man and wife on the lightning-scathed tree-trunk, which had

never been removed, he remembered the confession wrung from her agony on that very spot; his arm stole round her waist in the pitiful compassion it evoked. A new emotion stirred within his breast. He folded his wife in his arms, and pressed upon her answering lips his first spontaneous kiss of dawning affection.

Half-way home they were met by Crazy Joe, who had been sent to seek them. A consecutive message was beyond his grasp. All they could make out was, "Back! Sharp! Quick!" And, hastening on in alarm, they at length discerned Mr. Ashton at the gate, on the look-out. His pleasant nod was reassuring.

"My dear," he cried to Ellen, as they advanced, "Dick has got his promotion at last; Lieutenant Chadwick has been duly gazetted. Here is his letter to your mother, dated from Mal——Stop, my dear!"—Ellen had put out her hand for the thick, heavy missive—"A communication which

called your old uncle Ashton out of his way to act as courier is not to be dealt with lightly. And before it is read I must know whether you would rather be Mrs. Clegg or Mrs. Travis ?"

Closer she clung to the arm of Jabez.

"Oh, uncle ! How can you ask ?"

There was a sly gleam in the corner of his eye.

"Ah ! just so. That's it. How *can* I ask ?"

But his face sobered. He handed the letter to his new nephew.

"Jabez, I think you had better carry it to your own room, for private perusal. I will communicate its contents to all whom it may concern besides."

Jabez had deep feelings, though he was not demonstrative, and long before he had mastered its contents he was thankful for the delicacy which had spared him an open display of irrepressible emotion.

The writer, who was stationed at Malta,

after dwelling on his own promotion, and answering sundry maternal questions relative to himself, went on to say—

"And so our Nell's going to be married. Well, it's about time—she'll be twenty-six next April, or I've lost my reckoning.

"And so she was fretting herself to fiddle-strings for a fellow younger than herself, and without a shilling or a name, when she might have had a finer fellow, with name and shiners to boot. Bravo! Nell, for choosing a brave lad instead of a money-bag! She's the sister for a sailor, whatever Charlotte may think.

"But your story of the flood and the cradle and your mention of Mr. Travis, coming both together, recall a story I had forgotten, which may perhaps furnish a name for Nell's hero of the Irk and Peterloo.

"We had a broad-set sailor on board the *Royal Sovereign*, who was always getting into scrapes for chalking caricatures of

the officers on the bunks and cabin-doors; but there wasn't a man fore or aft that hadn't at some time or other coaxed a picture or portrait out of him, to send to mother or sweetheart, and never a Jack Tar amongst them would split on good-natured Ben Travis."

Down dropped the shaking hand that held the letter. *Ben Travis!* What strange coincidence was this?

"His father had been a Liverpool shipbroker, and Ben took to me because I was a Lancashire lad like himself, though he was old enough to be my father. He had been pressed, and as I was the youngest middy, and he the master of the forecastle, many a time had he told me the sad story of his life. His father had died without a will, and Ned his eldest brother had laid his clutches on everything but a hundred pounds or so, which had been the mother's. Ben turned his back on Liverpool and his brother, and being smart with his pencil,

took to that to get a living. He wandered about to pick up bits of scenery, and at Crumpsall fell in with a widow and her daughter, both named Ann Crompton, and went to lodge with them. After awhile he married the lass, and thinking if he meant to earn a living for his wife and the child that was coming he'd best seek a large town, he removed to Manchester, and took an old cottage in Smedley Vale, where he hoped to turn his talent to account."

The paper rattled, and Jabez leaned against the window-frame, as much for support as light, as he read on with panting lips.

"He tried portrait-painting, but lacked a patron; he turned his hand to pattern-designing, but no one would employ a raw beginner. His money was dwindling, and a birth was near at hand. He doted on his wife, and for her sake wrote to his brother, who was married when their father died. Ned wrote back, enclosing a

bank-note, and begging to see him at once. His wife had died, leaving a baby-boy, whom he had christened Ben, after his runaway brother. Ned said her loss was killing him, and he wished to leave his boy in his brother's care before he died. Poor Ben Travis kissed his wife, and went by coach to Liverpool. Before he could reach his brother's office in Castle Street, near the docks, he was pounced upon by a press-gang, dragged on board a ship in the Mersey, and never saw brother, or wife, or home again. I have seen Ben's tears roll down his weather-beaten cheeks many a time as he told this. He was one of the first sent down to the cockpit at the battle of Trafalgar, and when Admiral Nelson's glorious remains went home to be buried, Ben went likewise, to hospital, and I lost sight of him. When I was exchanged to the *Excellent*, Ben turned up again, hearty, but aged with grief. He had sought his dear ones, but a flood had swept through

Smedley Vale in 1799, and left no trace of his home. A man at a dye-works remembered something about an old woman they called stiff-backed Nan being killed by the falling house in trying to save a baby; but Ben could learn no more, and his own impression was that wife, child, and mother-in-law had perished in the same catastrophe. He went to Liverpool. Death had swept off his brother; executors swept off the son Ben, his namesake. He went back to sea, and I saw the brave Ben Travis drowned in trying to save a bum-boat woman who fell overboard off Spithead.

"And now, mother, you used to be a good hand at patchwork—piece my story and your story together, and see if Ellen's poor cradle friend is not near of kin to your rich friend, Mr. Benjamin Travis, with quite as good a right to be called Mr. Travis too.

"I should have a rough sketch of the

old sailor, drawn with a quid of 'bacca on the fly-leaf of his prayer-book. I'll look it up for Nell."

CHAPTER XII.

MAN AND BEAST.

THE January twilight had deepened into dusk, and from dusk to dark, before Jabez was sufficiently master of himself to descend into the light of the rooms below.

Whatever of surprise or satisfaction Richard Chadwick's letter had held for him, a wave of sorrow had passed over soul and countenance for the sad fate of the parents whom he had never known. As his footstep was heard overhead, Ellen flew to meet him at the foot of the staircase, and threw herself into his arms.

"My love! my own husband!" was all she said, but such an intensity of devotion and sympathy was in the act and tone

that he felt he had indeed a true heart beating with his, as he held her close, and his lips touched her forehead as a seal to a new bond.

It was but a single step to the parlour door, which opened on a room all aglow with light and radiant faces. On Mr. Ashton's inspiriting, Simon's easy-chair had been wheeled in from the house-place, there being no stately Mrs. Ashton at hand to demur at the innovation, or whisper a syllable of class distinctions. And surely that was not—yes, it was—Ben Travis himself standing by the rheumatic old tanner, with both hands outstretched, to greet a new cousin in his long-time friend. And there was Bess, proudly glancing from his face to a piece of yellow paper. "It's as like as two peas," she cried for the twentieth time, handing to her tall foster-son a sketch which, though little more than a succession of brown smears, was a ludicrous resemblance to himself.

"Well, Jabez," said Mr. Ashton, sitting by the fire, with his handkerchief over his knee, after the first hubbub of congratulation had subsided, "it is as well our new partnership has not been gazetted. I suppose there will have to be a change of name, and Ellen there will be Mrs. Travis after all."

This was but a playful sally on his part, but Ben Travis visibly winced, and quick-eyed Jabez saw it.

"No, sir," replied Jabez calmly, with his hand on his wife's shoulder, "there will be no change. I bear the name of the kind friends who saved my infant life; fed, clothed, and kept me through evil report and good report, through pinching poverty, privation, and pain" (he glanced towards Bess); "as Jabez Clegg I was enrolled as a Blue-coat boy; as Jabez Clegg I was apprenticed to you, sir; as Jabez Clegg I married my wife; as Jabez Clegg I have been honoured with a place in your firm; and Jabez Clegg shall go with me to the

grave. I had no name when that good man" (pointing to Simon) "lent me his; time has made it mine, and I mean to keep it as honourable as it came to me." He looked down: "Mrs. Clegg, are *you* content?"

"Perfectly, Jabez."

A long-sustained pinch of snuff spoke Mr. Ashton's approbation, whilst Simon could only reiterate, "Eh, lad, when aw tuk thee eawt o' the wayter, aw little thowt whatn a blessin' theaw'd be to us, or the credit theaw'd bring on ar neäme! Aw nobbut wish Parson Brucks wur aloive neaw to yer thee."

"Our relationship will only bind our friendship closer, whatever name you bear," put in Ben Travis warmly, in spite of himself pleased with the decision which would spare him the pain of addressing Ellen as Mrs. Travis.

"An' meals come reawnd whatever neäme yo' ca' them by," supplemented Bess, who, like Martha, troubled with much serving,

had been running in and out during the colloquy, whilst a combination of savoury odours, and a clatter of knives and plates, came from the adjoining room; "it's supper toime neaw, an' nobbody's had even theer tay yet."

"Just so, just so, Mrs. Hulme. But never mind the tea," said Mr. Ashton; "here comes your good husband in from the cellar, with a bottle or two of generous wine to drink to new relationships."

"I think I shall go abroad for a few months, Cousin Jabez," said Travis to him, as Mr. Ashton mounted first into the gig to return home next day. "I require to dissipate thought. If I were occupied as you are from morning until night there might be less necessity. But—I say, Chapman the landlord here tells me you painted this sign. I think the faculty must run in the blood, for I do a bit in that line myself sometimes. How is it I have not seen a brush in your hands latterly?"

"Well, I got a hint, through painting

that very sign, that trade and art were incompatible, and seeing the force of the remark, as counselled—the 'cobbler has stuck to his last.'"

"Look you, cousin" (Travis seemed fond of the word), "the fabled shield had two sides—stick to your trade if you like, but don't let your trade absorb you. A business man who allows himself no leisure, and has no resource out of his business, is apt to degenerate into a money-grubber. I hope better things of you."

A nod, a shake of the hand, and the gig rolled off with its occupants, and Jabez stood looking after them, hesitating whether to go back to the mill or to the cottage. The casual word of warning had come not one whit too soon. That which was sending Travis abroad had kept Jabez close to business. He had not sought so much to dissipate thought as to circumvent it by substitution. If he had given his leisure to the cultivation of art, it had of late

been art only as connected with manufacture and money-making. Even his honeymoon he was casting into the mill as grist. He was very ready to take a hint. He turned his steps towards Carr with something like a sigh.

"Well, perhaps I might as well give my afternoons to Ellen whilst we are here. I did not come to work, and the poor thing does need some compensation for the lack of a lover's ardour. God forbid that she should ever suspect that I married her out of pity, or that I should become a money-grubber. I wonder if Travis thought I was likely to neglect her? It is a thousand pities she should set her mind on me instead of him. And why she should passes my comprehension. He has every advantage of face, figure, and fortune, to say nothing of his evident devotion. Ah! women are strange creatures, and men are not much better. I fear I am very ungrateful not to reciprocate her attachment

more fully. Why, here she is running down the avenue to meet me, as if I had been gone a month. I really ought to love her better than I do. But love can neither be forced nor crushed. Heigho!"

Back to Manchester they went, rather sooner than expected; and then, though Jabez threw himself into business with a will, he bore in mind the parting words of Ben Travis.

The contemplated amalgamation was effected, not without extra draughts on Jabez and his leisure. But as partner of a large firm, even though a junior, it was obvious he could not work as designer for calico-printers, or for any other than their own house. Consequently, not being a man of pleasure, his evenings hung rather heavily on his hands, especially as neither Ellen nor he cared for the card-parties which formed the visiting staple. His very marriage had driven away his closest

friend, and broken in upon plans and schemes which otherwise would have found sufficient occupation for his spare hours. Other friends, however, dropped in for an occasional chat; notably George Pilkington (to whom the wine-trade had opened a road to fortune), with his reminiscences and jocularity, broke in on the monotony of married life, that monotony which is as much to be dreaded by young couples as is a first quarrel.

Ellen knew it not, but Augusta's image often and often rose up between husband and wife, and would not be driven back; whilst Ellen's very caresses were a source of pain to him, so much he felt himself a debtor to her love. There was a void in his breast which she could never wholly fill; he himself complained of a dearth of intellectual recreation, and when Henry Liverseege suggested a return to painting, he fell back upon his advice.

The fact is he needed to be alone, to

have a place where he could shut himself up with himself, whether to indulge in day-dreams or to discipline his soul, or to think out the ideas of art, trade, or social economy which floated through his brain, and were dispersed by actual business or fire-side chat; such a sanctum as had been his so many years in Mosley Street; but self-conscious, he had shrunk from making the proposal, afraid to wound his devoted wife by showing a desire to isolate himself. The young artist's open remark was enough for Ellen. At once a small room, or rather closet, partitioned off from a large one, at the top of the house, was set aqart for his use. He shelved one wall for books, set up an office-desk, carried thither easel, papers, and painting materials; enclosed the fly-leaf of his father's prayer-book within glass and a black frame, suspending it on the wall before him as a sacred relic, and there after warehouse hours he was wont to shut himself in, and almost forget

that he was a married man. But this room acted as a safety-valve.

Luckily, in Ellen's eyes, Jabez could do no wrong; he was gentleness itself in all his comportment towards her, and the love which had sprung to life unsought, and lived so long without encouragement, asked but slight return to sustain it. It was treason for Mrs. Chadwick to hint that Jabez was "unsocial," or gave them "too little of his company." She was ever ready to resent it with the reply that—

"If he is not dull shut up there by himself, I am sure we three have no right to complain of dulness down here together;" yet if we analysed her heart very closely there were longings and yearnings for his society known only to herself.

It was judged advisable for the further introduction and extension of Ashton, Chadwick, and Clegg's business that one of the partners should travel occasionally as their commercial representative; and naturally

this duty devolved upon the active junior, whose capacity for the undertaking revealed itself not only in heavy remittances and a full order-book, but in a paucity of bad debts. Of course he travelled with a horse and gig for the carriage of samples, and now and then he would take Ellen with him on a short journey, an indulgence which appeared to fill the cup of her delight. And altogether the marital yoke in a few months adjusted itself to their shoulders very naturally.

It was during their absence on one of the earliest of these journeys that an event occurred which set the indignant blood of Jabez on the boil, and showed there was a fire smouldering, not extinguished.

The Aspinall home at Fallowfield was an ancient, many-gabled grange, with mullioned windows, recessed window-seats, expansive two-leaved entrance arched above; noble hall, with trophies from the hunting-field; grand staircase, with massive

carved oak balusters, flights of broad low steps, and wide square landings; long corridors, three or four rooms of magnificent proportions, and clusters of little ones grouped around unsuspected passages and stairs; open fire-places recently enclosed, and double doors to the chief chambers. Antiquity had set its seal upon the place, and filled the panelled rooms with quaint or obsolete furniture and adornments, as each successive generation had left its quota. High-backed chairs, sofas of grotesque device with dim worsted-work cushions and covers, heavy draperies of silk or velvet, and tables with legs of all possible patterns.

It had come to the former Mrs. Aspinall from her ancestors, and from her to her son on his marriage; consequently this was the home proper of Laurence and his wife, although they had a suite of rooms set apart for them at Ardwick, and Mr. Aspinall would fain have had his fascinating

daughter-in-law abide there always, instead of making his house a mere convenience for visiting in town.

Stabling and other outhouses were attached, the gardens were well laid out, there was a good quantity of grass-land, all enclosed within a high wall, and it lay away from the main road. Mr. Aspinall's carriage was a close one, for service as well as show. Mr. Laurence, on his accession to his mother's property and his wife's dowry, added to other extravagances not a like carriage, but a new Tilbury, and astonished the crowd by driving tandem.

Whitsuntide is the great annual festival of Manchester. It is the race week, the time when the Sunday-school children dress in their best to walk in procession and have excursional treats into the country. In 1823 Whitsunday fell on the 18th of May, when the hawthorn scented the air, and cherry-blossom snowed on the carriage which Mr. Aspinall sent for his

daughter-in-law, that she might witness from his drawing-room windows the interesting spectacle on the Green, and preside over the hospitalities of his open house during the week. At that time, as now, Monday was the day set apart for the children of all the Established Church Schools to assemble at the Collegiate Church, sing anthems, and thence defile in long procession six abreast, attended by their respective clergy and teachers, until they reached the Green, where the girls in their white caps and frocks were ranged within the enclosure of the Pond, the boys forming a dark cordon around them, and the crowd a motley one beyond. And then from the multitudinous young throats poured forth anthems of praise, in a volume of swelling harmony which hushed to silence the listening birds above them.

Augusta, not in robust health, lay on a couch by the window and looked on; her father-in-law watching her and anticipating

her wants with the homage of old world gallantry, for young Mrs. Aspinall was becoming an important person in his eyes.

Nor was Laurence much less attentive. He had been on his best behaviour for some time, and would scarcely let the wind of heaven blow too roughly upon her.

At that period Manchester races were held on Kersall Moor, an extensive tract of land generously set apart for the purpose by the owner, Miss Byron.

"The glass of fashion and the mould of form," was the handsome man who patted Augusta's shoulders, and stooped down to kiss her, on Wednesday, the first race day; but it was with something more than a shade of anxiety she saw him draw on his buckskin gloves, take the long reins, and mount his high Tilbury, with Bob beside him, and dash round the lower end of the Green at a canter.

Evening came to verify her fears. Back from Kersall Moor came the tandem and

the tandem's master, but the biped was *ebrius*. He was in that stage of self-satisfied elation which a contradictory word would change to fierceness, and the whim of the hour was to drive his wife to Fallowfield, and show her how dexterous a whip he was, and that not Ducrow could manage a tandem better than he.

It was in vain she or his father pleaded her delicate health, the height of the vehicle, the shaking she would sustain; he laughed at her fears, then fiercely insisted, and, not daring to disobey, she was hoisted to her perilous seat.

In much alarm, Mr. Aspinall mounted Bob on a saddle-horse to follow. The roads were dotted with vehicles and people, the latter shouting and singing, or muttering tipsy oaths, as the fortune of the day inclined them. He proved his dexterity in guiding his far-off leader through all intricacies, but so close did wheel often come to

wheel, that Augusta's heart seemed to leap into her throat, and her teeth chattered, although it was May.

After they turned off from the Stockport Road at Longsight, they "spun along at a rattling pace," as he said; but she had to hold by the rail to keep her seat, notwithstanding which, at the sharp angle by Birch Fold, the vehicle gave a lurch which almost pitched her off. At their own gate there was an abrupt stoppage for opening, their return being unexpected. Then the foremost horse refused to obey the rein and canter up the drive. Laurence plied his whip, which did not mend the matter, and but that Bob and the gardener were there to soothe the animals, and lead them to the house, worse might have followed.

As it was, Mrs. Laurence Aspinall was half dead with fear and the shaking. She was lifted down and carried, almost insensible, into the house. Cicily and one of the maids got her to bed, whilst

Aspinall himself, calling groom and gardener from the stables into the drawing-room, sat down to have a drinking bout with *them*.

Presently Cicily put a white face in at the door, and beckoned forth Bob, whom no drink seemed to affect, and sent him off as fast as four legs could carry him to bring back a doctor, and acquaint Mr. Aspinall and the Ashtons that her young mistress was very ill.

In less time than might have been expected, Mr. Aspinall's carriage brought to the Grange that gentleman, Mrs. Ashton, and Mr. Windsor, a young Quaker practitioner from Piccadilly. A competent nurse from the Infirmary was on the box.

There was no doubt she was in a critical state, but the immediate danger was warded off; and though Augusta was not able to leave her room in the interim, the scent of June's roses came in at the open windows before her baby was born, when

penitent Laurence went into raptures over wife and son.

For two or three days he hovered about the house, nervously anxious lest any sound should disturb the young mother. He saw that every domestic was shod with list, stopped the great hall-clock, and had the rolled-up carpets laid down on the polished oaken stairs.

Four days sufficed. On the fifth he rode off to town on Black Ralph on a pretence of business; but very little did Cannon Street see of Mr. Laurence that day. With every acquaintance he met was a glass to be drunk, "to wet the child's head." At the Scramble Club, where he dined, he paid for two or three bottles of wine, also "to wet the child's head," according to the practice of the club. Riding home, he stopped at the George and Dragon, Ardwick Green, and went through the same process.

There some one remarked that he was

too drunk to stand, much less ride home, when he swore with an oath that he would show them how he could ride; he and Black Ralph were equal to anything. And then amid roars of derisive laughter he flung out another oath, and laid a wager which was regarded merely as the boasting of a drunken braggadocio.

He had kissed his wife's pale lips on leaving in the morning, and she had faintly implored him to be home early—she did not dare add, "and sober." Towards nightfall she began to listen for his return. Hour after hour went by, and at one in the morning she heard the great gates and the door thrown open for their impatient master by the watching servants, and the strong steed come tearing up the gravel—ay, and on up the broad, flat steps, clattering through the great oaken hall, and, urged with whip and spur, and a madman's voice, mount the freshly-carpeted stairs, cross the landing at a stride, and driving

back the affrighted nurse, enter that sick-chamber where, with her baby at her side, lay the fair young wife, gasping and shrinking with terror, and there stand with quivering flanks and panting nostrils, as the reckless rider on his back cried in exultation—

"By G—d, I've done it!"

He had done it! No matter what noise accompanied the removal of horse or rider, the wife whom in his sober hours he professed to love so passionately lay insensible to sight or sound, and wakened only to a morrow of delirium.

CHAPTER XIII.

WOUNDS INFLICTED AND ENDURED.

THE spark lies cold in the flint until it is struck; and Ellen had not believed her quiet husband capable of so much passionate indignation as burst from him on the receipt (at Sheffied) of the details just given.

"Brute! ruffian!" burst from his lips, as the letter he had crushed in his grasp fell to the floor; and with a stamp he rose to his feet, pressed one hand across his knitted brows, and paced the dingy carpet from end to end in a state of restless perturbation, his wrath finding vent in epithets and invectives foreign to his tongue.

"Whatever is the matter, Jabez, love?" Ellen asked in amazement.

"Oh, Ellen, dear! that brute Aspinall ——" He could get no farther. Feeling choked his utterance.

She picked up the crumpled letter, and with almost equal exasperation and pain made herself mistress of its contents, in her womanly indignation and love for her cousin losing sight of her husband's excessive emotion.

Jabez left his journey unfinished, and drove back home with all speed. Ellen shared with Mrs. Ashton and her own mother the anxious watch in that large dim room, where the favourite of the family tossed her head from side to side, and muttered incoherent words.

In the sudden emergency, Bob the old groom's recommendation of his own daughter as a wet-nurse for the poor frail baby passed without cavil. Not until long afterwards was it known that Sarah Mostyn

was the last woman to have entered that house, and on such a footing.

One month, two months wore out before Augusta rallied, and Mr. Windsor, whose medical creed was to "let nature take its course," pronounced her out of danger, and fit for the removal contemplated by her friends, and resisted by Laurence. Double doors, however, could not exclude outer sounds, and so long as she shrank and shuddered at every crunch on the gravel, every echo of his raised voice, recovery was retarded. So the elder Mr. Aspinall, exasperated with his son, and most solicitous for the welfare of his son's charming wife, added his dictum to that of the doctor, offered his own carriage for her conveyance, and threatened to disinherit Laurence if he interfered.

Once in her childhood's home she amended rapidly, but with increasing strength came maternal yearnings for her infant, still in charge of the wet-nurse at

Fallowfield. A hackney-coach was sent to bring Sarah Mostyn with the child to its mother; but not a step would the nurse budge. She had no orders from her master, and the master paid her wages, and she "shouldna tak' orders from anny-body else." Messages were sent, and notes were written to Laurence, which he tore to shreds; but he kept away from his wife, and kept back the child.

At length she pined so much for her "dear babe," that Mr. Ashton and Jabez together sought Laurence out in one of his haunts (a tavern near Cockpit Hill), to prevail on him to let Augusta have her boy with her.

"Mrs. Aspinall herself deserted her child," he replied, all the more haughtily that Jabez was Mr. Ashton's seconder. "When Mrs. Aspinall thinks fit to return home to her maternal and wifely duties, she will find the nursery door open, and her son in trustworthy care. A true

wife's place is by her husband's hearth."

"Yes, sir, when the husband is a true man," replied Jabez, with decision.

"And who dares to say I am not a true man?" retorted Laurence boldly.

"I do!" promptly answered the other. "No true man would have imperilled his wife's life by a reckless drive in the dark night in a tandem Tilbury! Only a reckless madman or a ruffian would have forced a horse into a wife's sick-chamber, to drive her delirious with terror!"

"And pray, sir," haughtily responded the other, "how long has Mrs. Aspinall made *you* her confidant?"

"I have not the honour of Mrs. Aspinall's confidence," answered Jabez sturdily, looking him full in the face; "such facts are trumpet-tongued."

"Just so," put in Mr. Ashton, drawing his arm through that of his partner. "And the fact that Augusta shrinks at your name has spoken so loudly to us that if ever she

sits on your hearth again it won't be with my consent.—Come away, Clegg."

After this declaration, Aspinall changed his tactics. He wrote to his wife, requesting her return; then entreating it; and finally went in person to beseech her to "come back," vowing to "atone for the past with the devotion of a life."

The young mother yearned for her babe, the tender-hearted wife could not resist the appeal of the husband whom with all his faults she yet loved; and, regardless of the previsions of her mother, or the entreaties of her father, she allowed him to drive her home to the Grange.

Her first thought was the nursery. There she found, in addition to her own boy, drawing its sustenance from the nurse's breast, a well-dressed child, some two years old, playing with a wooden-milkmaid-rattle on the rug. Something in the child's face and auburn curls made her ask, "Sarah, whose child is that?"

"Mine. Whose should it be?" was the pert answer; and the boldness of the woman's manner checked further inquiry. But Augusta's heart had received a shock which shook the pedestal on which her idol sat enthroned.

For a short pace Laurence kept terms with his wife; and before her father or strangers he was her most devoted slave, but she underwent a species of slow torture in secret.

She soon found that Sarah Mostyn was mistress of the house as well as of the nursery, and that Sarah Mostyn's child was of as much importance as her own baby-boy.

Then he filled the Grange with his riotous associates, and compelled his wife to do the honours of his table, though their oaths and conversation overpowered her with disgust. And if one flushed with wine, or more bold than the rest, paid her a compliment, or looked too warm an admiration,

Laurence was sure to find his way to her side with his common undertone threat—"D——n you, madam, you shall smart for this!"—a threat always accompanied with sly pinches, which left their marks beneath her sleeves. Then, straightway, "my dear," or "my love" would be asked, in the blandest of tones, to sing a song, play a rondo, or perform some act of courtesy for the very guest who had excited his jealousy.

They had few lady visitors. The neighbourhood was remote from town, and sparsely inhabited. Mr. Laurence Aspinall's reputation was as a yellow flag to warn gentlewomen who had daughters or husbands to lose against close intimacy with their neighbours of the Grange. Pitying the isolation of one so formed to adorn society, Mr. Aspinall gave mixed parties at Ardwick Green, in the name of Mrs. Laurence, when the splendour of her attire and the assiduous attention of her husband

set rumour to contradict rumour. But save on an occasional family gathering she saw few of her own sex at Fallowfield.

And her position in her own home was rendered intolerable by the continued presence of Sarah Mostyn, who at first familiar, then impertinent, had become at last openly defiant.

It was not until all efforts to keep the nurse in her proper place had failed that Augusta appealed to Laurence to discharge her, the woman having refused to take a dismissal from anyone but her master.

"Tchut!" said he, "I'll soon settle that business!" and forthwith stalked to the nursery, whence his voice was heard in loud command; but the result was not the woman's removal, only a temporary submission, to be followed by fresh rebellion, and the confirmation of Augusta's worst suspicions. How often did the aggrieved wife then recall her thoughtless declaration to her mother, that her "husband's heart must

hold *her*, and *her only*," not even business to share in its possession! And how thankful she would have been to have had no rival then but business! She was finding the bed she had made for herself a wofully hard one; but she did not succumb readily, she had high spirits and a buoyant nature, and would hardly admit to herself how much she suffered or how great a mistake she had made.

But Cicily, that most faithful of faithful followers, cognisant of her mistress's wrongs long before her mistress, paid Sarah Mostyn off in her own coin on various occasions, and took care that through one means or other the Ashtons should know what a life their darling led.

Amongst his other little peculiarities Mr. Laurence was an epicure; and one of his favourite tid-bits was that spongy lining of a goose's frame known as the *soul*. It chanced at a family dinner, rather more than a year after Augusta's return home,

that a fine stubble goose formed part of the bill of fare; and Cicily, who had long owed him a grudge for his heartless treatment of her young mistress, determined to pay him off, and expose him before the whole company. A good caterer for a dainty palate, Cicily knew her power and privileges, but in this case she overshot the mark.

One of the accomplishments of that generation was dexterous carving, and Laurence prided himself on being able to dismember a large fowl without once shifting his fork. The goose was set before himself, and duly helped, but, lo! when his knife would fain have extracted his favourite morsel it scraped bare bones.

The flat bell-rope was pulled violently. Cicily was summoned, and Cicily, in clean linen cap and apron, stood in the doorway curtseying respectfully.

"What have you done with the soul of

this goose?" he demanded, in a tone of suppressed passion.

Cicily came a step or two forward with an aspect of marvellous innocence. "Eh, sir, it's not a goose, it's a gonder, and *gonders have no souls.*"

Scarcely an individual present but took the covert inuendo, and glances were exchanged across the board; but the look he shot at the woman as, incapable of speech, he waved her to retire, was one never to be forgotten, so much demoniac wrath was concentrated therein.

From the time when Jabez was acknowledged on 'Change as a Manchester man, was admitted into Manchester "society," and had absolutely become a member of the same family as his son, Mr. Aspinall punctiliously invited him with his wife; and Laurence, with widely different feelings, followed suit.

It was not until after the noble exploit to which Augusta so nearly fell a sacrifice

that Mr. Clegg could be induced so far to listen to Ellen's desire for conciliation, "now that they were all of one family," as to accept one of these invitations. After that event he was of Mrs. Ashton's mind that, "as offenders never pardon," Augusta needed a friend to watch over her. So he left his books, and his brushes, and his schemes for the class amongst whom he had been reared, and (believing his growing affection for his wife, and the babe she had borne him, a sufficient guarantee to his own heart for his own good faith,) when the Aspinalls invited he accepted.

As previously stated, Augusta had not dropped into tame submission all at once; her old wilfulness would have way at times; and the light shafts of her satire were frequently aimed with effect against her recalcitrant lord. More than once Jabez had averted disastrous consequences by checking her vivacity ere it went too far. But never had he been so thankful for his

self-appointed guardianship as on the night when Cicily thought to pay back her darling's wrongs.

To his surprise and pleasure, Ben Travis, just returned from the Continent, was of the party. He had not yet called on the family in Oldham Street, and Jabez never asked him wherefore. The cousins had much to talk over, and whilst Laurence Aspinall was pouring wine on his wrath, they discussed a project in which Jabez took an interested part, and which eventuated the following year in the Manchester Mechanics' Institution. But through all their discussion Jabez never once lost sight of Laurence, and from his excessively polite manner to her he augured ill for Augusta when the restraining presence of friends was removed. He communicated his fears to Travis, and when the goodbyes were said, and the various conveyances rolled out of the great gates, a fee to Luke the gardener, who was also gatekeeper,

kept them open. A whispered word was sufficient for those who had seen the look Laurence directed across the dinner-table from Cicily to his wife, and who knew the character and disposition of the man.

Mr. Travis's gig and the Ashtons' hackney-coach were kept in waiting close at hand, Mrs. Ashton and Ellen, well wrapped up within, waiting anxiously for they knew not what.

Back towards the closed house went Mr. Ashton and the cousins, treading carefully over the gravel. There was a flagged footway round the building, and from the windows of dining and drawing-rooms lights were still streaming. The last owner had lowered the middle window of the drawing-room as a door of access to the lawn.

As if by accident the curtains had been dragged a little aside in each apartment, and now there were watchers at the apertures. The elder Mr. Aspinall had made

an excuse and retired to bed early. Augusta, with a shawl wrapped round her, sat weeping on a sofa in the drawing-room, afraid to go to bed. High words had evidently passed whilst those outside had made their arrangements at the gate.

Presently into the dining-room sauntered Laurence, with his arm round the shoulders of Sarah Mostyn the shameless nurse. They sat down to the supper-table; he poured out wine into a goblet, and they drank from the same glass, he fed her with delicacies, and kissed and caressed her with an assured familiarity which told it was no new experience.

Long they lingered drinking and dallying, and the watchers might have thought no danger need be apprehended. Suddenly a word of the woman's, like a match to petroleum, set the whole man ablaze. He rushed from the room with a loud oath, the woman after him, apparently in alarm. The movement her friends made outside in

gaining the other window caused Augusta to raise her beautiful head, and at that moment her husband stood before her brandishing his cavalry sabre, and with his eyeballs glaring, fiercely vociferating, "I'll teach you, madam, to set my servants to insult *me!*" he made a fearful slash at her.

As she sprang aside with a terrified shriek, the old woodwork of the glass-door gave way, and before the tipsy madman could recover his guard to strike a fresh blow, his sabre was wrenched from him, and himself struggling in the grasp of three powerful men, his own gardener being one.

Poor Mr. Ashton's care was his stricken child, whose white shoulders, bathed in blood, were washed by a father's tears. Thankful then was Jabez to have been at hand, and on the alert, with so powerful an ally as Travis; thankful to have saved Augusta's life at any sacrifice of personal feeling; and only himself could tell what

his presence under that roof cost him.

Even Laurence had no inkling of it; the marriage of Jabez had closed his jealous eyes. But now, finding in his old opponent an unseen watcher over his wife—her defender when he had least expected,—his baffled rage was something terrible to look upon. He fought, struggled, vociferated, threatened, and foamed at the mouth; and Mr. Aspinall, coming thither, in his dressing-gown, aroused by the uproar, could barely master his indignation and disgust as he ordered the men-servants, crowding in half dressed, to "help to bind that murderous maniac down!"

It was well, too, that Mrs. Ashton and Ellen were close at hand, and a vehicle ready to despatch for a surgeon, for Augusta needed all their care.

Before three days were over there was a little coffin in the house, holding a still-born child, and there was a young mother,

with a plaistered shoulder, lying, white as her pillow, in a state of coma.

Dr. Windsor having exercised his best skill, as was his wont, left nature to do the rest, and youth and nature, between them, did their work effectually.

Fain would Mr. Ashton have removed his child once and for all. He offered to set up a carriage for her, if she would but leave her husband, and seek a legal separation, insisting that she owed a duty to herself, as well as to her husband. Mr. Aspinall himself begged that she would take up her abode with him, at Ardwick, if only for her own security. He had ceased to find excuses for his son, and his son's charming wife stood high in his esteem.

But Laurence had been beforehand, and, with plausible promises and penitential tears, and an adroit parade of her little Willie, also in tears "for Mamma," won her over to forgive, and to give him

another trial; and not all Mr. Ashton's eloquence, or Mrs. Ashton's proverbial battery, could win her from her decision.

"My dear mother," said she, "remember you told me 'what could not be cured must be endured,' and that 'as I made my bed so must I lie.' It is a long lane, mother, that has never a turn, I have heard you say many a time; and who knows but Laurence may take a turn now, and reform? At all events, it is my duty to give him a fair trial, and keep my own wayward nature in check, so as not to provoke him; and I must not leave Willie with that woman. I think Mr. Clegg would say I am right."

I am afraid she overrated Mr. Clegg's magnanimity much as she overrated her wild husband's promised reformation, for her decision struck a pang in the heart of Jabez little dreamed of by Ellen. Indeed, it cost him a sore struggle to subdue his concern for Augusta within the bounds of

duty to his own wife, whose many virtues were gradually winning their way into his heart, and towards whom his attention never relaxed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MOWER WITH HIS SCYTHE.

YEARS went by—Laurence had promised to remove Sarah Mostyn, but the woman laughed, refused to stir, and he let her remain—a thorn in his wife's side—training up the boy she had nursed, and whom he idolised, to scorn and jeer at his own mother; whilst her red-haired girl ran wild about the place as a young hare. He broke out from time to time, and his wife was the sufferer; he horse-whipped her, shot at her, and tortured her in every way that malignity could devise.

No wonder that so many tiny coffins of immature babes should be carried from

the gates of the Fallowfield Grange. No wonder if Augusta began to compare her lot with Ellen's, and to repent her scorn of a true heart because of its plebeian origin.

Meanwhile, the firm of Ashton, Chadwick, and Clegg prospered beyond expectation, the business tact and integrity of the junior partner alike aiding the extension and stability of the firm. To make way for its expansion more warehouse room was required. The Ashtons, not without a sigh for old association, relinquished their house, and removed to another, close at hand in George Street, little less commodious, however much Kezia might grumble at it. This was when Ben Travis, lacking employment for time, mind, and money, offered them to the growing establishment, and his influence as "Co." was accepted. This combination of capital and energy, as Jabez had foreseen, worked wonders for them commercially, enabling them to tide over the trade distress of

1826 with security and advantage. Long before then Jabez had offered to pay Mrs. Clowes her loan, with interest; but she told him she was going to render up her account where, not the coin she had, but that which she had given away, would be put to her credit; and so, as at first proposed, she made it over to her little godson, Joshua Clegg, before she was gathered to the great garner.

But the universal mower reaped a heavier harvest in 1828, when he swept his keen scythe over the bed of the river.

In 1822 Mr. Ashton (one of the first promoters of the Chamber of Commerce), notwithstanding his advancing years, took an active part in the formation of a New Quay Company, for the better navigation of the river Irwell. The company was established, quays were constructed, warehouses erected, boats built, traffic was extended, and the town generally benefited.

In the February of 1828 the axe, the

adze, and the hammer made a busy noise in the boat-building yard of the company, and sail-makers were active with their needles; for a flat, destined to convey cargoes of merchandise to and from Liverpool, was to be ready for the launch on the 26th, a day destined to send a thrill of horror tingling through the veins of Manchester, so sad was the catastrophe it closed upon.

The launch of the *Emma* was an event in the annals of the company, and of the town; consequently a large number of spectators assembled, a goodly proportion being admitted to the yard to take part in the ceremony, and go with the flat on her trial trip under Captain Gaudy.

Mrs. Ashton, saying "that when the cat's away the mice will play," had decided on remaining at home to watch the mice, but Mr. Ashton compensated himself by taking Ellen and her two eldest boys, leaving baby with its grandma; Jabez, detained by business in the counting-house, promising to

overtake them before they were on board. Mr. Aspinall, too, was there, and on his arm was his son's wife, and Laurence, with his boy Willie, close beside them. He was too jealous of the admiration she excited, to permit her to go into company, even with his father, unless he had also his own eye upon her, especially where there was a chance of meeting Jabez Clegg. He brought the boy for a treat.

It was quite a gala-day, and as the pleasant company mounted the deck, peered into the cabin, and chatted gaily to one another, they little thought to how many that would be a launch into eternity.

The boat, a large flat, fully rigged, painted white above the water-line, and black below, with sails set and flags flying, rested in well-greased cradles, her head down; the shipwrights stood ready with their daggers; painters with their cans and brushes to dab her sides as she slid past them; a band upon the quay played lively

tunes, and (fatal mischance) the people on deck flocked to one side to listen. The sponsor, a Miss Grimes, with her sister and our friends, advanced to the bows. The word was given; the ready daggers struck away the shores; the boat began to move; Miss Grimes caught firmly the bottle (suspended by a ribbon), and shattered it upon the vessel, proclaiming, with that baptism of wine, the boat was henceforth the *Emma*. Hurrahs and exclamations followed. The bows touched the water, which splashed the faces, then lifted from their feet the christeners and the Ashton party. The flat had *dipped too deeply*, heeled over on her *crowded* side, and *sank* with her living cargo clinging and fettering each other in the swirling waters, whilst shrieking spectators looked on helpless from bridge and bank, watching others braver and bolder, or better skilled, rush to the rescue to their own risk.

Who shall picture the horror and con-

fusion of that moment, when some scores of holiday people—men, women, children —were precipitated at one fell swoop into the water, shrieking and clinging to one another with that tenacity of grip proverbial with the drowning ?

The bridge, the Old Quay, the open space in front of the New Bailey Prison railed off at an elevation far above the stream, the steep steps, and the towing-path beneath, were all lined with spectators, though the fatal launch was made from a yard lower down the river on the Manchester side. (The New Bailey is in Salford).

As the vessel struck the ground, shuddering from stem to stern, before turning over on her side, and the final catastrophe was imminent, Laurence (sober for once) snatched his darling boy up in his arms, whispered a hasty word of instruction and confidence, and, regardless of aught besides, sprang with him into the water in the contrary direction, far as possible be-

yond the eddy and suction, and keeping clear of the struggling wretches who were pulling each other down, swam with him to the towing-path. But not until he had placed Willie under safe charge, beyond danger from the scurrying throng, did he hasten back to attempt the rescue of wife or father; and then neither was to be seen.

Mr. Aspinall had been an able swimmer in his day, and made a bold effort for self-preservation; but cramp seizing his gouty limbs, he was one of the first to disappear and perish, though boats and swimmers put out to the general recue.

It was vain to search for individuals, but well was his son's prowess tested that day; more than one drowning wretch he clutched from behind by clothes or hair, and urged forward to the bank, where the Humane Society's men, with ropes and grapnels, were ably seconded by volunteer humanity, and strong hands were out-

stretched to haul the helpless up.

Ben Travis had waited for Jabez, detained in the warehouse by courtesy to Mr. Gregson, the buyer for Messrs. Leaf of London, and the two, hurrying to make up for lost time, only reached the New Quay with Nelson at their heels as the hurrahs died out in appalling screams, and the waters of the Irwell closed over all the twain held dearest in life.

With the celerity of light, coats were doffed and shoes cast off, and the two leaped from the stone quay in hope and dread, but the good dog was before them, its teeth in a child's coat, swimming to the shore. Almost as Jabez touched the water, a sinking woman clutched his legs. With a plunge he freed himself, then, catching at her long hair, towed her behind him to the side, and swam back to seek and save his own wife and little ones, if that were possible.

A floating scarf, a mass of matchless

brown curls, a hand and arm above the water, and Jabez knew that Augusta Aspinall was sinking there before him. A few strokes brought him to the spot; he dived; a youth was clinging to her skirts, and held her down. One or both must have drowned. With a blow which went to his heart, he freed her, and, catching her beneath the armpit, held her well from him as he made for shore. To the Humane Society's men he yielded her—so far gone, the men shook their heads over the lovely woman as though she were beyond help. But they bore the dripping lady to the sail-room close at hand, whilst Jabez, taking the precaution to secure a rope to his waist, plunged boldly into the midst of the entangled mass in quest of his own.

It was a vain search; he brought one strange child, and then another, to bank, and then a man; but he was again laid hold of when his strength was exhausted; and but for the precautionary rope, he would

have given to the greedy river the life Simon Clegg had saved from it.

Travis had the good fortune to rescue Mr. Ashton, but he had been some time in the water, and the old man was far spent; but there was no trace of Ellen or her boys, even though he dived close by the sunken flat, and brought up lifeless bodies in their stead.

Jabez and he could only hope some other of the brave men, putting their own lives in peril, had saved them.

The governor of the gaol had opened his house doors, the recovered dead were carried into the gaol itself, the sail-maker's room was crowded, every tavern near was filled, but no trace was found of Ellen or their sons, and Jabez was like one distraught.

He was but one agitated atom in that seething, surging, frantic crowd, where women shrieked for their husbands, parents for their children, children for their

parents; where passing strangers threw themselves into the water to save life, and lost their own; where ignorance lifted the hapless by the heels "to pour the water out" and extinguished the last spark of vitality; and where yelping dogs astray were caught and slaughtered, that medical skill might transfuse the warm blood of the lesser animal into the veins of the human, as a last resource to restore suspended animation. Even gallant old Nelson narrowly escaped falling a sacrifice to the surgeons.

Jabez entered the room where Augusta Ashton was lying, to all appearance, dead —ordinary means of resuscitation having failed; and a surgeon was about so to operate on her from a bleeding spaniel on the ground. Jabez shrank with a strange loathing; in an instant bared his arm to the doctor's lancet; and if he did not give his life to serve her, as he had once said, he gave his life's-blood to save her; and as the warm fluid passed from his quick veins

to hers, he saw the blue quivering lids tremble, light pass into the brown eyes, breath part the blue lips once more; and from the depths of his anguished heart he thanked God as a faint "Jabez" indicated recognition as well as returning animation.

He had restored a wife to thankless Aspinall; but who should restore to him the darling boys who had crept about his knees and round his heart, and the good wife who had won a place there, in spite of fate, by her own patient, but intense, love?

The *Emma* was raised and floated, so little damaged that she was speedily ready for use, and continued so for many years. In her cabin were found the remains of Ellen and her sons, where the childish curiosity of the elder one had doubtless led all three; but they were raised from the water only to be committed to the earth, and covered up out of sight and hearing for evermore; and never did Jabez know

fully all she had become to him until he stood with Travis by the side of an open grave, and heard the clods rattle on the coffin-lid. She was all as one then to the man who had worshipped her, and the man she had worshipped; and though the babe she had left behind was nearer to the one, it would be hard to say to which little Nelly was the dearest in the aftertime.

Including the bodies found beneath the flat and those laid out in the gaol and elsewhere for inquest, thirty-three lives were sacrificed on the altar of the *Emma;* and of these must be reckoned the brave men who cast their lives away to rescue others.

Among the early saved were the Captain, Miss Grimes, and her sister, the two latter being hastily conveyed home in a private carriage (mayhap Mr. Aspinall's), with coats and cloaks wrapped around their saturated garments.

Good, kind, genial Mr. Ashton never re-

covered from the effects of his long immersion. He was a man far advanced in years, and the shock was too much for him. He hobbled about the warehouse, snuff-box in hand, a few months, and then dropped asleep in his easy-chair after a game of cribbage with Jabez—never to wake again.

And then the excitement and agitation consequent on the loss of his dear Ellen and her romping boys having brought on Mr. Chadwick a fresh attack of paralysis, which left him still more helpless (though he survived many years to pet and spoil Ellen's baby-girl), Mrs. Ashton, lonely in her large house, proposed that her sister's family (Jabez included) should join her in George Street; but when she would have said "the more the merrier," the words died on her lips. Who were they but the survivors of two wrecked households?

After a little hesitation the offer was accepted, and the whole family gathered in

their shorn proportions under one roof. But there was another proposition from another quarter, to which there was considerably more demur. Mrs. Hulme, in a warm grey-duffel cloak, for the preservation of her new mourning, travelled from Whaley-Bridge, to ask as a favour that baby Nelly should be committed to her care.

"You see, Mrs. Chaddick, th' poor little babby 'll thrive better yond than here ith smooak; an aw'd fain do summat for Master Clegg, he have done so much fur feyther an——"

Jabez interrupted her.

"Hush! Mrs. Hulme. I owe life and all that life has given to your father and yourself. What little I have done in return has been but dust in the balance. Yet as it is your desire, and I know baby would be best in your hands, if grandmother will consent to part with her, Nelly and her

nurse shall go back with you for the coming Summer months."

And so, though parting with Ellen's baby seemed parting with Ellen over again, the little blossom went away to other blossoms on the healthy hill-side.

Tom Hulme was no longer overlooker, but responsible manager at the Whaley-Bridge Mill, with a good salary; and if Jabez gratefully traced his fortune back to his cradle, so too did they trace their amended position to the same source. But Bess more immediately referred to the benefit Simon Clegg had derived from the Buxton Baths, whither Jabez had sent him year after year, for the relief of his rheumatism, and to his care of steadfast little Sim. He had first placed the crippled lad with a doctor celebrated for his treatment of bodily deformities, under whom the boy's bent body had strengthened and straightened considerably, and then removed him for education to the house of a married clergyman,

where there were no rough boys to torment him. Jabez knew well what were the amenities of public schools.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST ACT.

THE catastrophe which deprived Laurence Aspinall of a father, and had almost robbed him of a loving, patient wife, would have steadied any man less reckless and selfish than he. But that he should rescue strangers, and Jabez save his wife, and that through transfusion the blood of Jabez should course through Augusta's veins, formed a combination of mischances beyond parallel, and the honey was changed to gall. Nay, he was graceless enough to exclaim, in the first burst of his jealous rage, "I would rather she had died outright than have that fellow triumph in her

restoration through his means. D—— him!"

And yet there were times when in his uxorious fondness he wholly persuaded himself, and half persuaded her, that his very extravagances arose from excess of love!

His fancied wrongs culminated when first the will of his father, and after a brief period that of Augusta's father, were read and proved.

The former set forth that, disgusted with the ungentlemanlike excesses of his son, and convinced that his course of lavish extravagance would end in penury, he had determined to settle on his son's wife, Augusta Aspinall, for her sole use and benefit, the house and premises on Ardwick Green, with all therein contained, together with a sufficient sum in the funds to maintain a befitting state; in the event of her decease, the reversion to pass to any child or children she had or might here-

after bear to his son Laurence. To him he left the residue of his means, and the old business in Cannon Street, with a charge to apply himself to merchandise.

The latter will, though equally stringent, was a much more prolix affair. After a number of legacies, of which Jabez came in for one, Mr. Ashton bequeathed to his wife all other properties whatsoever he died possessed of, together with half his share in the firm of Ashton, Chadwick, Clegg, and Co.; the other half to his beloved daughter, limiting the annual sum she was to draw from the firm, and which was in nowise to pass into the hands of her depraved husband; and Jabez Clegg and Benjamin Travis were appointed executors for the due performance of its provisions.

Imagine the excitement and jealous fury of Laurence Aspinall on thus being set aside even by his own father and superseded by his wife; and as if that were not sufficient degradation, to have Jabez Clegg,

whose charity-school face yet bore the impress of his foot, set as his wife's executor, to dole out what he called a "pittance" where he had anticipated a fortune!

It so happened that the early duties of his executorship called Jabez once or twice unexpectedly to Fallowfield, and that on each occasion the master of the mansion was from home.

It might be that the river had washed the roses from Augusta's cheeks so effectually that her complexion had never regained its tone; or it might be that her skin looked white in contrast with the blackness of her bombazine and crape; certain it was that Jabez was struck with the pallor of her countenance, and his inquiry, "Are you not well, Mrs. Aspinall?" was tinctured with alarm.

As a light flush tinged her cheek, then faded away again, and she received him with a timid indecision very unlike her former girlish freedom, a sense of her

almost supernal loveliness brought something of the old ache into his heart, and out of respect for himself and her, he hurried over his business, and having obtained the signatures for which he came, mounted his gig and drove back to town, haunted by look, and voice, and manner.

Yet in the integrity of his own heart he had no conception that her embarrassment was the result of fear—fear of the interpretation her jealous madman of a husband should put on so unwonted a visit.

He thought he saw a smile of malice in the corners of the mouth of the bold woman who met him in the hall, and nodded to him so freely as he passed her on his way out; but no prescient spirit whispered in his ear that his twenty minutes' visit on absolute business would furnish envy and jealousy with a pretext for foul-mouthed slander, for coarse vituperation, for the use of a whip, and for calumnious accusations which cut deeper than its lash.

Cicily, who intervened to save her mistress, might have conveyed some inkling of this to Mrs. Ashton, but Augusta absolutely forbade her sympathetic servant's interference.

"You would do no good, Cicily," she said; "the evil is beyond earthly remedy; you would only distress my dear mother to no purpose, and she has suffered too much on my account already. It cannot last for ever!"

On the next occasion Jabez was accompanied by his joint-executor, but even that fact did not save Augusta from her husband's wrath, and his vile aspersions went far to drive out the last lingering sentiment of affection or regard she had for him. But she clung to her child, and that bound her to her home and him whom in an evil hour she had chosen; though tears fell bitterly on Willie's curly head, when he, like his father, gave her back blows for kisses. And if at times her conscience smote her

for her haughty repulse of Jabez by the stair-foot window at Carr Cottage, what wonder? Had not Laurence himself scored his rejected rival's name on her heart with his braces and whip-lash?

She shut the obtrusive memory out with a shudder, and, dropping on her knees, prayed earnestly for strength to bear and to forbear.

Yet much of the cruelty of Laurence at this time arose from another source than causeless jealousy. He had been living far beyond his private means, and was greatly involved. He had calculated on laying his hand on a good round sum, and was disappointed. In order, however, to raise the needful, he sold his father's old-established concern to their head clerk, far below its value. On the Fallowfield estate his friend Barret held a mortgage; and, had it been possible, he would similarly have disposed of Augusta's possessions. Here, however, he was doubly

baffled, and he turned on her as the primary cause.

The old law which preserved the woman's absolute right over properties legally settled upon herself, by strange anomaly did not secure to her one guinea of the coin those properties produced.

Well did Jabez watch over Augusta's interest, but his heart ached as he saw her sad countenance, and the greedy triumphant eyes of ever-present Laurence when her dividends were paid in. For, before his very face, Laurence laid his hand upon the money, to squander it as he had squandered his own on Sarah Mostyn and other dissolute companions, leaving his wife without so much as would purchase a pocket-handkerchief.

Then, lest she should make her wrongs known, he kept her a close prisoner at Fallowfield, and for all the pleasure she had of her Ardwick mansion, she might as well have been without it.

No wonder if each fresh act of personal violence snapped some bond between them, until the only one link to bind her to life and her husband was her boy Willie; whilst the only human trait of Laurence was his fondness for his son, whom he was rapidly ruining with false indulgence, as he himself had been ruined.

It was customary, when the hay-making season came round, for Laurence to gather such friends as his wife or he retained—the married with their children—for a frolic in the hay-fields, and the bringing home the last waggon-load in triumph to crown or inaugurate a feast.

On these occasions he had the grace or the diplomacy to keep Sarah Mostyn in the background, though she flaunted boldly enough about the house in the presence of his wife, and her child mingled with the children.

The harvest-home of 1831 was attended with the customary festivities, Willy, a

rough playmate, half smothering Nelly was Clegg in the hay, or chasing the Walmsleys amongst the haycocks, until the last load was ready, and then the boy insisted that he and his companions should be mounted atop. Shouts and cheers announced their coming to the party in the drawing-room; they came crowding to the windows, and the glass-door being open, one or two sauntered out on to the flagged walk. Merrily they came along the gravelled drive, under the hot sun, dreaming of no danger, Willie clapping his hands and calling, "Look at us, papa," when, right in front of the drawing-room window, the pin which held the body of the cart down by some means became displaced, the cart tilted up, and hay and children were sent flying.

Beyond a few bruises, none of the children were injured but one; they had fallen amongst hay, or on the spongy lawn; but Willie, the one jewel in the Aspinall casket,

pitched with his head on the flagged pavement, and killed on the spot.

Draw we the curtain over consternation and bereavement, and pass on to results. If a change came over Laurence, it was not for the better. He drank incessantly, became alternately moody and defiant, and added a coping-stone to his offences by placing Sarah Mostyn at his table by the side of his wife, and boldly avowing that her child was his child also.

Then all the woman rose within Augusta, so long cowed and dispirited. She left the table, and, the insult being repeated, again retired in indignation.

Of the servants none had pitied her so much as Cicily, but for whom communication with her friends had been cut off. Often had the former waxed savage over indignities she could neither check nor prevent; but in many little ways the faithful domestic was enabled to ameliorate the condition of her mistress. Now that Mrs. Aspinall—more lovely in her sad woman-

hood than her brilliant girlhood—was virtually supplanted, a prisoner under torture in her husband's house, with no tie of motherhood to bind her there, her old nurse, as the mouthpiece of Mrs. Ashton and her aunt Chadwick, urged upon her once more the necessity for legal separation, and she no longer turned a deaf ear.

When Jabez next came to hand over the quarter's dividends, Travis accompanied him, and then Augusta, in the presence of both her executors, demanded and claimed her right to a legal separation from her husband.

Laurence, taken by surprise, started to his feet, then, resuming his seat, said, with a scowl and a contemptuous sneer—

"You had better obtain a divorce, madam, whilst you are about it. Mr. Clegg will not object to the cost, if you can only be made Mrs. Clegg by Act of Parliament."

It was a cruel and uncalled-for sneer, and Travis, firing up, resented it for his

friend, who seemed dumbfounded by the suggestion.

"If she *had* been Mrs. Clegg, sir, instead of Mrs. Aspinall, there would have been no necessity now for the interference of friends for her protection!"

"Of course not," sneered Aspinall. "Mr. Clegg is the white hen that never lays away; and now, having favoured you with one of Mrs. Ashton's pithy proverbs, perhaps gentlemen you will favour me by taking your departure; this house and this lady are alike my property."

The value he set upon the latter article of property was testified by an immediate application of a horse-whip, so savagely applied that even Bob, and Luke the gardener, drawn thither by Augusta's screams, wrenched the whip from him, and covered her escape, the latter declaring he would "no longer stay an' witness sich wark."

To this man, who was also gatekeeper,

Cicily crept at nightfall, and offered him a goodly sum down, out of her own savings, promising a much larger one from Mrs. Aspinall, with the offer of a new situation at Ardwick, if he would only suffer her ill-used mistress to "get clear o' that brute's violence."

The man, to his credit be it told, refused the money, but opened the gate; and, when Laurence wakened from his sodden sleep at noon the next day, wife, cook, and gardener were missing.

They walked to Ardwick, and once there, though Augusta found sad havoc had been made in the place, all was her own, carriage included, and the domestics in charge welcomed her with gladness.

Without waiting for even the show of a breakfast, Augusta hurried like a frightened bird to the mother's nest in George Street, where alone she felt secure.

Jabez and Travis were summoned, and when Aspinall, recovering from his stupor,

sought his human property at Ardwick, he found the trustee under his father's will—a Mr. Lillie—holding the place for Augusta in right of his trust. And in George Street he was refused admission, Mrs. Ashton justifying her daughter's flight with "self-preservation is the first law of nature. A good Jack makes a good Jill. It is the last straw breaks the camel's back. If you sow the wind, you must reap the whirlwind. He who beats his friend makes an enemy."

He threatened, and she answered—

"Threatened folk live long. You had best, Mr. Aspinall, keep your breath to cool your porridge. Augusta's friends will defend her from her only enemy. Pending separation, you see her no more."

He never saw her more. The deed of separation was *sealed*, but never signed.

With Augusta, all good angels seemed to have flown from Fallowfield. In his demoniac passion, he strove to blacken her

character, to find himself met with laughter —his own life had been so chaste! Whilst, as if to refute him, when she took refuge with her mother, Jabez deemed it a point of honour to retreat. Accordingly he took up his temporary abode with Travis, in delicacy towards her, and as a check upon himself. No act, or thought, or word of his must give an evil tongue a chance to foul that spotless woman with its slime.

In the midst of all this, Aspinall's embarrassments increased. Creditors pressed; writs showered in upon him; Barret foreclosed, and men were put in possession of the Grange. He flew to his old remedy, and it drove him mad. Lancaster Gaol for debtors loomed upon him. From his chamber window he saw a fresh sheriff's officer approach with a warrant. His cavalry-pistols were in his dressing-room. A sharp report rang through the house. Laurence Aspinall, in the prime of life, delirious with

drink, driven to desperation by his own profligate excess, set a blood-red seal on the deed of separation.

Ten years had passed from the partnership of Ashton, Chadwick, and Clegg—years in which money well employed had multiplied itself. Jabez was a rich man—a man of influence in the town; no longer the amateur artist, but the patron of art, as well Henry Liverseege and others could tell. As he had been one of the first promoters and directors of the Manchester Mechanics' Institution, so was he now the supporter of the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Art; and seeing farther than Mr. Ashton, who, as a member of the New Quay Navigation Company, had opposed the Act for a railway between Manchester and Liverpool, he threw his energies into the project, and helped to carry it, his cousin Travis working with him.

His widowhood had cast a gloom over him for a time, but he left himself small leisure for morbid reflection, and that was cheered by the prattle of his little Nellie. Then came the crash at Fallowfield, and when darkness set upon Aspinall and his deeds, light broke upon the path of Jabez Clegg—at first a mere ray, but he worked the more cheerfully in its light. It was not *hope* for himself; it was merely a joyful consciousness that there was hope and calm in the sky over the head of their fluttering and wounded dove, and that Augusta could now rest in peace with her mother in the house at Ardwick, with no dread of a brutal husband bursting on them unawares.

He came and went as friend and executor, but it was long before it flashed across his comprehension that the fearful ordeal through which Augusta had passed but brought his old master's daughter closer to him; or that the prayer old Simon had

taught was being answered to the full. That which was "above rubies" had blessed his life and kept his human heart warm whilst his "coast had enlarged;" he had been kept from the evil of a wilful and capricious wife; and at last when he had resigned all prospect of setting the purified pearl as a star on his own breast, it dropped into his hand, unsought, unsolicited.

He had schooled his heart we know. He had married from a sense of duty and grateful compassion. He was a faithful husband to a true wife, and when he lost her he mourned her as a valued friend. But though all the early love of his being had been kept alive and in a ferment by the sufferings of Augusta, as an honourable man he suffered no word or look to betray more than a friend's sympathy. And still he kept as strong a guard over himself, though the tragic end of Laurence had set her free once more.

That last fatal act struck a sensitive chord in Augusta's nature. There was no exultation at release. For a time she lost sight of his profligacy and cruelty, and accused herself of having hastened the catastrophe by leaving him to his own unbridled will and the temptress by his side. She wept for the handsome lover who had captivated her young fancy; she mourned for the besotted soul gone to its account with all its imperfections rampant.

"Let her alone," said Mrs. Ashton to her sister; "the sharpest shower wears itself out soonest; she will come to her senses long before her crape is worn out."

Mrs. Ashton was a true prophetess. For a long time the Fallowfield tragedy cast a shadow over the house at Ardwick, and they led very retired lives. Then harp and piano were heard once more, visitors were admitted, and the mansion that Kezia and Cicily united in declaring "worse than a nunnery," grew bright and cheerful, though

the widow's weeds were not cast aside. (Kitty had been laid under the mould whilst Augusta was yet a bride).

Almost two years had elapsed. Suitors in plenty had been attracted by the wealthy young widow's many charms, her old admirer, Mr. Marsland, among the rest, yet Mrs. Aspinall showed no disposition to change her state; and the one man who had loved her longest and best was not of the number at her feet. He scorned to importune now in his widowhood for the love withheld when they were both young. He counted age by events, not years.

It was for Augusta *now*, she who had been taught by her very husband's taunts and sneers to think upon the true man she had set aside, to think of him daily and hourly with rapidly strengthening attachment, and think of him as one who had dropped her from the book of his life for ever. Her whole thought was how could she become worthy the love of such a man;

yet every day and hour the fear pressed heavily upon her that the quiet virtues of Ellen had driven her out of his heart altogether. Of all her guests he was the one most welcome, most desired, but he was the one she received with most reserve, the one whose stay was briefest, whose visits fewest. "Business" appeared to have more imperative claims on him than when he had his way to make; and Augusta, whose sables had long since been cast aside, seemed to wear them on her heart. The vivacity which had never wholly forsaken her in all her trials, forsook her now—she grew listless and melancholy.

Meanwhile Captain Richard Chadwick had come home on half-pay to brighten up the somewhat dull house in George Street, and comfort the old folk—to say nothing of astonishing Sim and Nelly—with his long yarns and adventures. Sim always spent part of his vacations with Mr. Clegg, who well

paid back to Bess all her early care of him. He indulged the boy's craving for books and pencils first implanted by himself, and in which he saw the dawn of his future career. That which in his own case had been repressed and subordinated to trade and money-making, should not be so checked in that boy; and old Simon, to whom the lad appeared a marvel, never ceased to pride himself on his forecast in pronouncing Jabez a "Godsend."

It was during the second Summer of her widowhood when Augusta accompanied her mother (not a whit the less stately than of yore) to Carr Cottage for the first time since her attempted elopement, that the feeling of all she had cast from her, and all that she had brought upon herself, all that might have been, and now never would be, pressed heaviest upon her. She had gone thoughtfully over the old ground, had trod the nettle-grown Lovers' Walk, and sat down on the open window-ledge at the

stair-foot as once before, and wept tears of penitent bitterness. How long she sat there she could not tell; she was weeping for a life lost and a love rejected. As once before the voice of Jabez (whom she imagined eighteen miles away) broke upon her solitude, but now it thrilled through her.

There was a light touch upon her shoulder.

"Mrs. Aspinall?"

She shuddered.

"Oh! don't call me by that name—*here!*" broke from her imploringly.

"What name shall I call you by?" half wonderingly; then in a lower semi-smothered tone of entreaty—"Augusta?"

Lower sank her head in her hands; but there was no answer save her sobs. It was thus he had addressed her there once before.

"Augusta!"—and this time the hand on her shoulder shook—"Augusta—dear

Augusta, once on this very spot I found you weeping thus, and I begged to be allowed to share your grief. I told you I would give my life to serve you—what I said then I repeat now—I *would* give my life to serve you, and you *know* it!" He gently drew one hand from her agitated face. "Tell me your trouble, as you would tell it to a brother!"

A brother—ah, that was it! She drew her hand back, but she did not rise, and her sobs seemed to choke her.

Again he took her hand, and his other arm went round her soothingly, protectingly. "Oh, Augusta, this is inexpressibly painful to me. I love you, as never man loved woman. Can you not tell me what troubles you?" and the earnest tenderness of his voice made strange music in her ears.

He had seated himself on the narrow window-ledge beside her, and now he thought she was about to punish his pre-

sumption and quit him haughtily as before.

But no! She only slid from his arm to his very feet, and cried, with still covered face,

"Oh, Jabez—*dear* Jabez, forgive me all I made you suffer here; for oh! I have repented bitterly."

He was stunned, bewildered. His passionate declaration of love was made as a claim to her confidence, not to her affection; and now—"*dear* Jabez!" Did he hear aright? For an instant he was silent from very incapacity to speak. Her bent head touched his knee.

Slowly, reverently, as if she had been a saint, with every nerve of his strong frame trembling with emotion, he raised her from the ground; but no arm went round her now. He held both her hands in his, and looked steadfastly down upon her; but no answer made he to her plea for pardon. Constraint in voice and words was apparent

and painful, but emotion grew too strong for control.

"Augusta, what is the meaning of this? For God's sake do not mislead me! I seem on the threshold of heaven or madness. Is it possible that I, plain Jabez Clegg, can be 'dear' to you?"

"Dearer than life!"

Clear, full, and earnest came the words from her soul, clear and truthful were the eyes that now sought his.

"Thank God!"

He held her in his arms with a straining clasp, which told how long they had quivered to embrace her so. His eyes lit up with an intensity of love she knew not he could feel, and never had his lips met woman's in such kisses as he pressed on hers.

The concentrated love of years seemed gathered to a focus then. "Life of my life!" he called her, and she knew and felt it was so.

If the shade of the departed Ellen could have looked upon them there, remembering how she had rushed to his embrace in that very spot, and how different had been the kiss imprinted on her wifely brow, would she have reproached him? I wis not.

Is it needful to add that, before the Summer waned, the Manchester Man, rapidly rising into public note and favour, entered into another partnership; or that Jabez Clegg, in right of Augusta his wife, took possession of the mansion at Ardwick, to the satisfaction of Mrs. Ashton, who said, "Better late than never?" Or to tell how the trade of Ashton, Chadwick, Clegg & Co. continued to extend? Or that Travis remained Co. to the end of the chapter—the children's Co., never taking a wife unto himself?

APPENDIX.

IN the foregoing story of the "Manchester Man" I have in a great measure dealt with history, recorded and unrecorded absolute people, events, and places.

I have not thought it advisable to break the narrative with cumbrous foot-notes calculated to disturb the general reader; but I consider an elucidating Appendix due alike to myself and to all those who, in perusing a work of this kind, care to discriminate fact from fiction.

Little of the Manchester I have depicted remains intact, a whirlwind of improvement (!) has swept over the town, but old inhabitants will, I think, recognise the faithfulness of my descriptions, as they will remember many of the persons who come and go incidentally throughout.

VOL. I.

CHAP. I. (A)—After writing this chapter, I learned that a cradled infant was washed down the Irwell from the

Broughton, not the Smedley and *Irk* side, in the flood of 1837. I was familiar with the incident I relate when I was quite a child myself, and I am now fifty-three.

The two cases are therefore distinct, yet equally facts. In 1771, during the floods which swept away Tyne Bridge, Newcastle, a vessel took up at sea a cradle in which was a child alive and well.

CHAP. III. (B)—The Rev. Joshua Brookes comes into my pages naturally—no story of Manchester life at the commencement of this century would be complete without him. I have endeavoured to do justice to a little-understood man. Many of his eccentricities are on record. At my own baptism and my mother's churching, occurred the scene which I have endeavoured to reproduce; that delicate lady pushed and pulled about was a stranger to my mother and sponsors. A characteristic anecdote, which I have not met with in print, may not be out of place here.

A printer, of republican tendencies, named Cowdroy, took his son to the font, and on the child's name being required, answered "Citizen!" —"Citizen?" growled Joshua, "that's no name. I shall not give the child a name like that!"—"I've a *right* to call my child what name I please, and I dare you to call him otherwise," boldly asserted Mr. Cowdroy.—"Oh, you may call him Beelzebub if you like!" testily responded the chaplain, and Citizen the boy was accordingly baptized; and the large sign-board of C. Cowdroy, Printer, overlooked the

Old Churchyard long after Joshua Brookes was laid low in dust and ashes.

His odd friendship with old Mrs. Clowes is matter of fact. Similar scenes to those I have described took place at funerals and weddings when he officiated; and his last contest with the Grammar School boys may be found in Harland's "Collectanea."

CHAP. IV. AND V. (C)—The little girl who made her way into the presence of Prince William, sat on his knee and amused him and his suite with details of toilettes in progress at home, to be rewarded with a plain shilling, the required information, and a bow as the *cortége* passed down Oldham Street, was Amelia Daniels, in after years my own mother. The incident of the falling platform on Sale Moor is noted in history.

CHAP. VII.—Mrs. Clowes was as eccentric in her way as Parson Brookes; but beyond her dealings with the chaplain and school-boys, her journey to Liverpool, her Sabbath dinners to the poor, and her attire, her place in this story belongs to the region of fiction. Her shop passed to a relative, but the date of her death is unknown to the writer.

VOL. II.

CHAP. I AND II.—Peterloo is rapidly passing out of remembrance, and those who were not themselves

eye-witnesses may accuse me of exaggeration. To such I can only say that I have had my details from actors or spectators. The house I have assigned to Mr. Chadwick in Oldham Street, was occupied by my maternal grandfather, John Daniels, and he was the paralyzed old gentleman in charge of his servant Molly, who, but for the timely interposition of a young man named Tomlinson, one of his own weavers, and Mr. Mabbott, would have been cut down. His daughters, anxious for his safety, looking out for his return home from the warehouse, saw from their open window more than I describe; for one thing—a woman passed with her breast cut off; the two vaunting officers who reared their steeds against the house with threats, were a cousin and a *fiancé;* the man who was shot down in Ancoats Lane, whilst bidding *his* girls to retire, was, I believe, my grandfather's tenant. The female sabred on the hustings was a Mrs. Fildes when I knew her. Her son, Henry Hunt Fildes, was in my father's employ; and either that same son, or a grandson, is now an artist, not altogether unknown to the world. From Miss Hindley I had nine years ago the story of her father's fall. The author of the satire on the yeomanry was my paternal grandfather, James Varley, of Pendleton.

For the purpose of my narrative, I have antedated an occurrence in the Theatre Royal. I was myself the little miss who cried out in alarm that Edmund Kean was "killing Mrs. McGibbon," but it was a few years later. Mrs. Broadbent's school occupied the next box

to our party on that occasion. I need scarcely add that I have drawn that lady, her school-room, &c., from information and observation. The broken collar-bone is not an invention.

CHAP. XI. AND XII.—The skating incident on Ardwick Green Pond was an episode in the early life of the same John Daniels before-named. Blindness followed his long immersion, and when all remedies known in the last century failed, he regained his sight by swimming across the Mersey, as related. I owe it to his memory to say that he must not otherwise be confounded with the man whom I have called Laurence Aspinall.

CHAP. XIV.—The Act for widening Market Street was obtained in 1821; but I find that the ancient houses did not begin to "crumble into dust" until the following year.

VOL. III.

CHAP. VI.—"I'll please my eye if I plague my heart," with its answer and consequences, formed the original base of this story; the wilful girl and her handsome savage of a husband being in *all* respects but their names realities. They were both in their graves before the period I assign to their union. The old Hall which witnessed so many outrages and such sad catastrophes, may be found in the map of Hardwicke's History of Preston under its true name.

CHAP. XIV.—For much information respecting the fatal launch of the *Emma*, I am indebted to the courtesy of the Secretary of the Bridgewater Navigation Company, and also to Mrs. Abel Heywood (the wife of the publisher), who has just presented to Manchester a statue of Oliver Cromwell, in the name of her former husband, Mr. Goadsby, who had been Mayor of the city. Mrs. Heywood was originally the Miss Grimes who christened the luckless flat.

I cannot close this Appendix without acknowledging much kind assistance from literary and antiquarian friends in my researches. Of these the late John Harland, Esq., antiquary and historian, the late Thomas Jones, Esq., librarian of Chetham Hospital, and the Rev. J. Finch Smith, M.A.,B.D., must be placed foremost.

ISABELLA BANKS.

London, January, 1876.

THE END.

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